

**Université de Montréal**

**Building Beyond Limits: Fantastic Collisions Between Bodies and Machines in  
French and English Fin-de-Siècle Literature**

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## **Résumé de synthèse**

«Construire hors limite: collisions fantastiques entre corps et machines dans la littérature fin-de-siècle française et anglaise» explore un ensemble de textes qui ont surgi à la fin du dix-neuvième siècle en réponse et en réaction à la fulgurante évolution de l’environnement scientifique et technologique, et qui considèrent la relation entre l’homme et la machine en fantasmant sur la zone grise où ils s’intersectent. Les principaux textes étudiés comprennent L’Ève future de Villiers de l’Isle-Adam, Le Surmâle d’Alfred Jarry, Trilby de George Du Maurier, Le Château des Carpathes de Jules Verne, ainsi qu’une sélection de contes dont nous pouvons qualifier de «contes à appareils», notamment «La Machine à parler» de Marcel Schwob.

Utilisant la théorie des systèmes comme base méthodologique, cette dissertation cherche à réinterpréter les textes de la fin du dix-neuvième siècle qui naviguent les limites de l’humain et du mécanique et les surfaces sensibles où ils se touchent et interagissent en les réinscrivant dans un projet plus vaste de construction d’identité qui défie le temps chronologique et les échelles mathématiques. Le lien entre la théorie des systèmes et l’architecture – comme méthode d’organisation d’espace blanc en espace habitable – est exploré dans le but de comprendre la manière dont nous façonnons et interprétons le néant à l’origine de l’identité individuelle, et par association collective, en pratiquant littéralement la schématisation et la construction du corps. Des auteurs tels Villiers et Jarry imaginent la construction du corps comme une entreprise scientifique nécessairement fondée et réalisée avec les matériaux et les technologies disponibles, pour ensuite démanteler cette proposition en condamnant le corps technologique à la destruction. La construction d’une identité amplifiée par la

technologie prend donc des proportions prométhéennes perpétuellement redessinées dans des actes cycliques de rasage (destruction) et d'érection (édification), et reflétées dans l'écriture palimpsestique du texte. L'intégrité du corps organique étant mis en question, le noyau même de ce que signifie l'être (dans son sens de verbe infinitif) humain pourrait bien s'avérer, si l'on considère la correspondance entre perte de voix et état pathologique dans les textes de Du Maurier, Verne et Schwob, être une structure des plus précaires, distinctement hors sens (*unsound*).

Mots clés: Corps, Machine, Système, Réseau, Architecture, Technologie, Son, Appareil, Origine, Décadence

## **Abstract**

“Building Beyond Limits: Fantastic Collisions Between Bodies and Machines in French and English Fin-de-Siècle Literature” explores late-nineteenth-century texts that emerged in response, or in reaction to, the rapidly evolving scientific and technological environment and which specifically consider man’s relationship to the machine by fantasizing about the grey area where they intersect. The core texts examined include Villiers de l’Isle-Adam’s L’Ève future, Alfred Jarry’s Le Surmâle, George Du Maurier’s Trilby, Jules Verne’s Le Château des Carpathes, and a selection of short stories which we may refer to as *contes à appareils*, most prominently Marcel Schwob’s “La Machine à parler.”

Using systems theory as its underlying structure, this dissertation sets out to reinterpret late-nineteenth-century texts that navigate the limits of the human and the mechanical and the sensitive surfaces where they touch and interact by re-inscribing them into a greater project of identity-building that defies chronological time and mathematical scale. As such, the connection between systems theory and architecture – as a method of organizing blank space into space that is inhabitable – is explored in order to understand the way in which we shape and make sense of the void at the origin of individual, and by extension collective, identity by engaging in the literal act of body mapping and building. Authors such as Villiers and Jarry set up the building of bodies as a scientific endeavor which must necessarily rely on available materials and technologies only to level this proposition by condemning the technological body to destruction. The construction of a technologically-enabled identity thus takes on promethean proportions which are perpetually redesigned in the cyclical acts of raising

and razing, and reflected in the palimpsestic qualities of the texts. At stake is the integrity of the organic body, of the very nucleus of what it means to be human which, as evidenced by the equating of pathology with the loss of voice in the texts of Du Maurier, Verne and Schwob, may very well prove to be a structure which is distinctly *unsound*.

Key words: Bodies, Machines, System, Network, Architecture, Technology, Sound, Apparatus, Origin, Decadence

For Antoinette Martella



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I offer my final thank you to my mother, Antoinette Martella, whose sharp analytical mind and evocative writing provided a model of excellence to aspire to, and whose love of literature and of her daughter lead in no small part to the undertaking and completion of this dissertation. I wish you could have read this last version, Mom, because in the end I did it for us. I will continue to give thanks, always.

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## **Introduction**

Any declaration of a starting point or original locus for this project would probably be artificial, but in the thickets of my mental archives glimmers the moment of heightened awareness that came with reading Jean-Marie-Mathias-Philippe-Auguste, comte de Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's L'Ève future. The Decadent literary corpus had long been of interest, but here was a text that combined the peculiarities of an obscure late-nineteenth-century genre and the very contemporary preoccupation with humans being superseded by seductive humanoid machines.

One of the least contested assumptions about the term “decadence,” with regard to a particular period or work, is that it is notoriously resistant to definition. The term's very fluidity and adaptability are paradoxically tightly interwoven with its structure, thus “decadent style” displays an obstinately dense profusion of language, with ornate verbosity and sometimes exasperating minutia contributing to the overall impression of a particularly noisy text that occupies a liminal literary position. As Asti Hustvedt has pointed out in her introduction to The Decadent Reader: Fiction, Fantasy, and Perversion from Fin-de-Siècle France, a fully developed decadent movement or school never actually existed (“Art of Death” 13). In his literary journal of the 1880s Le Décadent, Anatole Baju would attempt to define the late nineteenth century in terms of a “deliquescent” modernity with, as Hustvedt notes, “its connotations of liquification and dissolution” (“Art of Death” 13). Following Charles Darwin's publication of The Origin of Species (1859) and The Descent of Man (1871), it does not seem unreasonable to associate such viscous visions with the specifically fin-de-siècle fear that “the human race might ultimately retrogress into a sordid animalism rather than

progress towards a telos of intellectual and moral perfection” (Hurley 56). As positivism gained momentum throughout the nineteenth century, an array of scientific and pseudo-scientific disciplines began to emerge in order to explain and hopefully counter the effects of decline. Criminal anthropology was one such discipline, and while its main exponent Cesare Lombroso was lesser known by the literati, his theories regarding primitivism and degeneracy were nevertheless widely influential on the scientific discourse of the day, and so affected (or infected) the literary output indirectly. Furthermore, in 1893 Max Nordau published what would become a bestseller across Europe, his diatribe against fin-de-siècle authors and artists entitled Degeneration, which he dedicated to Lombroso, expressing his fervent admiration of the man's work and expounding the genius<sup>1</sup> with which he develops degeneration theory. Lombroso linked degeneration with criminality, and argued that the criminal bore on his body the stigmata of his deficiencies. Other disciplines, most notably that of hysteria, also argued that pathology was something that was etched on the body, leading to the conclusion that if the symbolic language of the disease could be decoded by the cultured man of science, the liminal body of the hysteric could be brought under control. Criminal anthropology, however, not only abolished the Cartesian distinction of surface and depth, but established the criminal as an atavistic throwback who had slid irrevocably down the evolutionary scale. Thus low brows and protruding jaws were sure signs of at least latent criminal intent. Worse, degeneracy would inevitably

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<sup>1</sup> I will not develop the point in this essay, but it is interesting to note that genius itself was considered by Lombroso, and consequently by Nordau, a sign of degeneracy. See Cesare Lombroso's The Man of Genius, particularly Chapter Four entitled “Genius and Insanity” 66-99, and George L. Mosse's introduction to Nordau's Degeneration xx.

be passed down through generations, leading potentially to rapid national and cultural deterioration. This enfeeblement of society was, according to Nordau, symptomatic particularly of fin-de-siècle modernity. Frantic urban spaces were a breeding ground for illicit behavior and nervous exhaustion, exacerbated by the trappings of modern civilization, including “steam-power, the periodical press, the telegraph, the sciences, and the mental activity of women” (Beard qtd. in Hurley 74).

“The luxuries of civilization,” explains Brian Stableford, “were indeed enervating” but the decadent, for his part, understood that “such luxuries were nevertheless succulent, and must be savoured rather than denied” (6). If one had to choose between the excitement of artificiality and the relative simplicity of nature, one might very well espouse the taste of a des Esseintes, the foppish noble of dilapidated health who drifts along the pages of J.K. Huysmans’s À rebours, the novel Arthur Symons would qualify as “the breviary of the decadence” (Symons 76). Purchasing a giant tortoise on a decorative whim, des Esseintes has its shell covered in gold and then meticulously encrusted with jewels as an antidote to the dullness of its natural carapace. In a letter to Arij Prins, J.K. Huysmans commented on the “human machine”’s inferiority to “man-made machines” which can be “decoked, unscrewed, oiled and parts replaced.” “Decidedly,” he added, “nature is not a very wonderful thing” (Selected Letters 76). Huysmans repeatedly complained, it might be added, of neurosis and the sort of neuralgia that made “one bang one’s head against the wall” (Selected Letters 42).<sup>2</sup> Through its dense tangle of excessive and convoluted

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<sup>2</sup> See also Huysmans, Selected Letters 47, 230, and Marc Fumaroli’s preface to À Rebours 28-29.

language, meant to unhinge the senses through sheer literary gluttony, the decadent text may also be described as participating on a textural as well as textual level with the development of a modernity which Nicholas Daly defines as “the disruption of a traditional social and political order, as well as the creation of a new experience of time and space” (15). Furthermore, the literal incorporation of technology in both the methods of writing and structuring the late-nineteenth-century text elucidates the dissolution of boundaries between author and technological tool, increasing the danger of being insidiously contaminated by the very mechanisms of communication exploited. Fin-de-siècle literature unapologetically indulges a rapacious appetite for artifice. Marie Lathers contextualizes this decadent convention by situating it within a broader discursive current, writing that “the artificial in the nineteenth century was indeed an ambivalent notion, combining as it did the age-old ability of art to *imitate* nature and the newly discovered, or at least newly imagined, ability of industry and technology to *replace* nature” (27-28). At the literary *fin* of a particularly industrious *siècle*, the artificial is considered far superior to the natural and infinitely preferable, complicating the very idea of authenticity.

While developments in thermodynamic and evolutionary theory may have contributed to the envisioning of a future in which humans got swept up in a hopeless entropic drift, the frighteningly rapid pace of technological progress meant that this decline of humanity was often expressed in specifically technological terms, occasionally in more or less proficient jargon. Unsurprisingly, decadent texts got tangled up in the fall of man and the rise of the machine, and with the transitional,



fluctuating, deliquescent space in between. It is this in-between space – where man and machine intersect in their uncertain trajectories – that is of particular interest to this dissertation, and it is where most of the discussion will take place. Whether the collision between organic and mechanical is as violent as a train wreck – an apt analogy in evoking nineteenth-century fears and fantasies – or rather more like a silent meeting between two strangers in anonymous semi-obscurity, the aftermath of this encounter, however quiet, noisy or explosive, leaves a ground that is simultaneously fertile and bare, ready to be inscribed with new meaning. This dissertation sets out to reinterpret late-nineteenth-century texts that navigate the limits of the human and the mechanical and the sensitive surfaces where they touch and interact by re-inscribing them into a greater project of identity-building that defies chronological time and mathematical scale. The core texts considered include Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's L'Ève future (1886), Alfred Jarry's Le Surmâle (1902), George du Maurier's Trilby (1894), Jules Verne's Le Château des Carpathes (1892), and a selection of short stories which we may refer to as *contes à appareils*, most prominently Marcel Schwob's "La Machine à parler" (1892).

What this project of re-inscription implies concretely is that various technologically-relevant methodological strategies are explored and then implicitly applied to the texts discussed, in order to begin drafting a blueprint of the way in which we quite literally build identity – human identity, individual identity – through intimate interaction with technology, and then split the singular up into a multiplicity of identities. The building is both the building (noun) and the building (verb). My

dissertation focuses on the textual levels of such an edifice, of such an enterprise, while considering the larger implications of what it means to assimilate and be assimilated by technology, from the surface of the text, to the limits of the body and over into the surrounding environment. In many ways, fin-de-siècle treatments of the encounters between men and machines, with all their anxiety, delight and contradiction, significantly anticipate contemporary questions of collective and individual identity formation as enabled by accessible or embedded social apparatus. This project is therefore a project of textual exchange and networking that takes nineteenth-century fin-de-siècle texts that intersect the human and the mechanical as an artificial point of origin to then expand it to a scale that encompasses concerns of a technological “nature” colored with the new mythology of twentieth and twenty-first-century theory.

Decoding the theoretical structures which would prove useful involved some heavy lifting, and while it would be difficult to dissociate the present work from the edifices of structuralism and post-structuralism, my work relies most heavily on the principles of systems theory, and by extension developments in cybernetic theory, notably with relation to ideas of chaos and analogy. With dabbling in abstraction came the realization that a more powerful argument could be built – quite literally built – out of material that had a concrete foothold in the way in which we interact with our environment, operate on an individual and collective level, and then translate this behavior to the surface of text. Structuralism and its subsequent related movements became construction work. Texts became bodies of work, and bodies became works of architecture. Everything seemed to *work* within this model, to grind toward a common,

intangible goal. Simultaneously, it all seemed quite fragile, as though the wrecking ball were set to swing in its direction. I believe this very sense of contingency, instability, and liminality – as though we were hovering over the gaping jaws of nothingness, the vacuum of erasure – is at the very nucleus of fin-de-siècle texts concerned with the complex relationships between humans and machines.

Contemporary techno-organic interaction may not appear so bleak on paper. Indeed, Donna Haraway's groundbreaking 1985 essay "Manifesto for Cyborgs: science, technology, and socialist feminism in the 1980s" posited quite an enthusiastic view of human-machine couplings and their encouraging political possibilities. And while we have reconciled our selves with the apparatus we utilize through assimilation and incorporation, I believe fin-de-siècle treatments of techno-human intersections help shed some light, even if it is sometimes flickering or oblique, on contemporary technophilic fantasies, which are perhaps symptomatic of a malady born of our own *siècle*. This project, I should emphasize, focuses very much on the specificities of nineteenth-century technologies, but bears in mind the methodological material available to twenty-first century builders, one of which I believe I am.

Chapter One is concerned with unpacking and selecting the material with which to begin building. The subsequent chapters are implicitly constructed with these materials on their theoretical foundation. Laying them out for appraisal was therefore a necessary exercise. A passage from Jules Barbey d'Aurevilly's 1874 collection of stories "Les Diaboliques," a work seized, I might add, for offense to public morality, hovered over the first mental drafts of this chapter like a billboard in an empty lot: "I

had constructed a whole edifice of suppositions, more or less plausible, to explain what, to anyone but a reasoner like me, would have been inexplicable” (112). I was all the while uncertain whether “a reasoner like me” could not rival an outfit like Monty Python for logic. But this very absurdity, the subtle sense that there is something both outrageous and tenuous, almost insubstantial, in taking hold of high abstraction, driving it into the ground like a stake, using it as scaffolding and then fleshing out an argument around it that has a concrete impact (or the impact of a block of concrete) seemed like the sort of wonderful contradiction with which fin-de-siècle literature is infused. The artifice, the ephemeral, the symbolic convert to the real, and make of the real a convert to the new mythologies of materiality, falseness, iconic construct.

The impetus to examine the spaces and methods through which these fin-de-siècle operations of conversion could take place and make them intelligible lead to engaging a dialogue with contemporary theory. In the wake of Haraway’s “Manifesto for Cyborgs,” Judith Butler’s important writing on performativity, particularly with emphasis on the process of embodiment as developed in Bodies that Matter, Michel Feher’s conception of body building as intrinsically linked to modes of construction, and Mark Seltzer’s analogizing between the building of bodies and that of nations in Bodies and Machines, the construction of identities, individual and collective, becomes associated with and benefits from some of the self-constructing, or autopoietic, principles of systems theory. Niklas Luhmann’s application of systems theory to social systems therefore became the methodological nucleus of my project, the blueprint for the unwieldy edifice in which fin-de-siècle texts would operate on the same level as

contemporary interpretations of body and identity building, if with different tools, technologies and materials. Elements of system theory, and the architectural analogizing that was derived from it, inform not only the vocabulary, even the iconography, so to speak, of my dissertation, but the structure of my project – indeed, I began to view my first chapter as my project headquarters and subsequent chapter subdivisions as individual cubicles or floating nodes interacting with each other and the greater, vaster environment with varying degrees of complexity.

Developments in cybernetics clearly needed to be addressed in order to contextualize social systems theory. The work of N. Katherine Hayles has not only been an excellent resource for providing a synthesis of cybernetic theory, but has been invaluable in elucidating its possible applications to literary studies, as has the collection Genesis Redux: Essays in the History and Philosophy of Artificial Life, edited by Jessica Riskin. Ira Livingston's Between Science and Literature: An Introduction to Autopoetics takes Hayles's work a step further by considering the living body as a pattern of information that is both fact and fiction (78), firmly establishing the connection between the construction of self and literary output, and then situating this self-construction on the surface of both the body and the body of the text, and within the depths of their respective organic and linguistic coils. Livingston's theories became my literary companions to Luhmann, and redirected my thoughts when they were in danger of spiraling off into irretrievable irrelevance. My copy of Between Science and Literature has been so profusely thumbed that its pages are coming away from the spine, and floating freely in chaotic disorder, which seems appropriate. Not

specifically referenced in my opening chapter, Livingston's work sat at a meta-level, surveying the layout of my work, available to be drawn from or build upon on command.

Other important influences include the work of Bruno Latour who, interacting with the theories of Michel Serres, builds a strong argument for the consideration of individual and collective identity as fabricated architectural projects. Equally influential was Giorgio Agamben's reworking of a Foucauldian notion of "apparatus." Agamben's introduction of an implicitly theological element to ideas of the self-perpetuating aspect of identity construction eventually led to the realization that building the self implies a point of origin, a foundation, and that furthermore this starting point may very well represent a sort of ground zero, a fallacy at the core of a new mythology, built right on the precipice of annihilation. At the core of Latour and Agamben's theories also operates the erasure of human and nonhuman distinctions.

At this point it seems appropriate to address some obvious omissions. Michel Foucault's important body of work and his enlightening discussion of the ways in which we regulate, archive, classify, constrain, propagate, and otherwise build ourselves, others – more specifically the other – through a discourse of normalcy and pathology has become so pervasive in literary criticism that it almost seems as though it was absorbed into my own work by osmosis. It also made extended referencing to Foucault seem somewhat redundant. "Foucauldian" is a widely recognized adjective, one that has unquestionably, perhaps ironically, colored the judgment calls I have made while interpreting the selected texts, and which occasionally surfaces amidst the

crashing waves of my literary landscape.

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari have not been referenced often or explicitly, but the substantial diffusion of their theories across a multitude of disciplines enabled the process of adapting to their theoretical environment. Eventually, Mille Plateaux and its treatment of rhizomatic literary machines became part of the undercurrent of my dissertation, and helped extend theoretical plateaux into an edifice of suppositions. Concretely, however, I found it difficult to reconcile the botanical underpinnings of the rhizome with the other materials being used to construct my arguments. The building of identity – its core, its shell – as an architectural endeavor is inextricably linked to the available materials and technologies, and so the body of my work needed to be plotted and shaped with a specific set of tools, which may be evidence of a stubborn adherence to the literal on my part. That being said, there is unquestionably room to explore their work in my own context, through Deleuze’s discussion of automata in “L’image-temps” for example, and while it is beyond the scope of this dissertation, I hope to engage the body of their joint and individual work more thoroughly in my future writing.

My first chapter is also an introduction to bad taste, to the punning and alliteration sprinkled liberally throughout this dissertation. “Bad” may be understood as the slightly camp, linguistic expression of the absurd, as a slightly contrived, rather synthetic, possibly counterfeit expression of an idea. Camp as Susan Sontag defines it, with a capital C that envelops exaggeration, artificiality and the unnatural (108). It may be considered “bad” along with “mad” and possibly “dangerous.” We associate

linguistic redundancy with the stuttering of the mentally unsound. Either interpretation would I think be appropriate to discussion of a decadent body of literature. More specifically, I wanted to build phonetic repetition into my text, allusion dissolving into illusion in the visual replication of letters and sounds, creating an almost palimpsestic echo, layers of phonetic coincidences enmeshed. Ernesto Laclau's analysis of Slavoj Žižek's Sublime Object of Ideology as a "series of theoretical interventions which shed mutual light on each other, not in terms of the *progression* of an argument, but in terms of what we could call the *reiteration* of the latter in different discursive contexts" where "each of these reiterations partially *constructs* the argument instead of simply repeating it" (xii) became an extraordinarily useful prototype for my own chapter design, which needed to be constructed on a micro level, the structure reiterated in the sound of words and things. This may have made for occasionally labored or tiresome reading, but what could be more appropriate when discussing nineteenth-century literatures of exhaustion, set against the frenetic backdrop of unstoppable progress only temporarily impeded when unreliable technologies break down in system failure? That the technologies of sound became such an important facet of my overall project also coerced phonetic blips, hiccups and redundancies into my prose, as though my own text became a rerecording of a literary tradition which began with the first uttering of "Mary had a little lamb"<sup>3</sup> into a talking doll, and the breakdown of the "VER-BE VER-BE VER-BE," of the word at the origin of mechanical reincarnation in Marcel

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<sup>3</sup> Which we may imagine becoming "Mary had a little lamb, little lamb, little lamb" ad infinitum, with each reproduction of Edison's talking doll, just as the aisles of toy stores nowadays reverberate with the cacophonous echo of a dozen talking/singing/dancing dolls activated at once by mischievous children (and adults).



Schwob's short story about a talking machine and its deafened and dumb progenitor.

Chapter One is also about the impossibility of containing texts within a framework, while maintaining the idea that establishing a methodological scaffolding from which to build or repair theories, texts and the bridges between these various entities is an important component in theoretical construction work. It is therefore an exploration of theoretical environments, and the operations that extend beyond immediate space into a vast network of exchange, that defy time and scale to liaise (in which we may discern the French word *aise*) with textual fragments which may be chronologically older by a century. It is, however, as irrelevant as it is impossible to situate the genesis of an idea in a pattern that is circular with feedback loops, just as it is impossible to conceive of transitioning from “embodied experience, noisy with error, into the clean abstractions of mathematical pattern” (Hayles 98). Time and scale must therefore be adapted and their parameters redrawn, with the realization that the results may be illegible, the lines indiscernible, caught as they are in the immense traffic of textual exchange, in the white noise of compounded voices. My hope is that some of my own enunciations will come through clear as a bell before they are swallowed by *analogue static*.

Some of the recurring elements of this thesis make their first appearance in Chapter Two. Technologies of sound are discussed, more specifically the phonograph in a context of inscription. Sound itself will begin to reverberate with more pomp in later chapters. Tides of sound, waves of noise are timidly introduced, and come crashing back in the fifth chapter. Pathology creeps stealthily into the text. The most

important leitmotif, however, is unquestionably that of the liminal process of building identity. Through a reading of Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's L'Ève future, identity – whether this identity speaks of the organic or the mechanical – unfolds as a system of construction and destruction replete with the cyclical operations of establishing a point of origin while moving toward the higher levels of an unattainable ideal. Foundation and edifice become the counterpoints of origin and identity, neither of which can be firmly established given that the site upon which building must occur is constantly being excavated and mined for the relics of past constructions. Building up and digging down may point in different directions, but these operations intersect in a space which constitutes base and surface in equal measure.

In L'Ève future, building a myth of origin is imagined as a technological undertaking. Villiers appears to tread skeptically, *à reculons*, into the territory of drafting the genesis of a new humanity in the portrait of an electrical Eve, yet his text is alive with currents, sparks and technical minutia. The detail with which Villiers constructs his *andréide*, his term for what is effectively a cyborg variant (the “org” part of the equation taking the form of telepathic animation and arguably of organically-derived principles of chemical synthesis), is representative of the technological scaffolding which supports his numerous and lengthy speculations about what exactly constitutes the nucleus of humanity and what sort of future may be envisioned if the blueprints for the man-machine are drawn out to their bleak conclusion. While Villiers's text interacts with the scientific developments in its immediate environment, it also coincides, on a larger scale, with the project of constructing a social body of

greater coherence which seems to lead, irrevocably and ironically, to dissonance and destruction, and which then cyclically, relentlessly paves the way for the erection of new mythological edifices. Social identity, intimately associated with the spaces in and the technologies with which it must interact, is taken apart as it is built. As one side goes up, another comes down so that raising and razing co-operate in a permeable loop formed during the process of building both origin and future.

The importance of physical structure is also considered using Villiers's detailed description of the *andréide* Hadaly as a springboard. In the molding of both interior and exterior space around the materiality of the supporting structure, not only do the parameters between inside and outside or surface and depth begin to shift, but the structure becomes a unifying nucleus around which bodies – individual, social, textual – may be sculpted, fleshed out, and supported. Using a human analogy, it is the skeleton that allows the structure of the body to stand erect, and to function recognizably, and as such it is a unifying, synthetic structure on both the micro scale of the individual and the macro scale of the social body. Useful and fascinating studies of Victorian domestic interiors, notably Andrea Kanston Tange's Architectural Identities, have explicitly linked the spatial design of the home with the shaping of its inhabitants' identities. My reading of L'Ève future takes this a step further, in considering the body as an architectural process which relies of a specific set of technological tools for its conception. The body has a governing structure around which interior space is organized and exterior space is navigated. Building bodies becomes building identities. They rise, they fall, they move laterally. Building takes

place on gargantuan scales, or in spaces so small the operations are invisible to the naked eye, but there are no voids, there is no respite. There is only the drone of construction which, as the ear adapts, begins to sound like a loud and persistent silence.

If discussion of Villiers's L'Ève future often takes a speculative turn, Chapter Three is initially concerned with laying a concrete foundation for discussion of the rather violent collision between man and machine that unfolds in Alfred Jarry's Le Surmâle. As such, it opens with a survey of the various theories which, building up from the Enlightenment, set out to prove man's mechanical nature. Parallel to the search for empirical evidence that life was in fact something which could be quantified and measured, appeared the literary analogizing of society as a factory and man as a cog in its wheel. As technologies developed, so did the vision of the sort of machine of which man was made. Nevertheless, if by the end of the nineteenth-century man was no longer a machine which wound its own springs, his/its self-regulation was still embedded in the immediate technological environment.

Benefitting from a twenty-first century perspective replete with not only an impressive amalgamation of literary humanoid machines, but with the evidence of the very real ways in which the human body may be improved by prosthesis, the move from defining the specifics of man's mechanics to imaging ways of augmenting the body's capabilities may seem a predictable trajectory. Nineteenth-century authors, thinkers, inventors and scientists indeed found fertile ground for both idealistic experimentation and dystopic speculation in envisioning the potential synergy between human and machine. If rapid developments in technology seemed to reach a frenetic

pace as the nineteenth century drew to its end, in tandem with the crowding of city streets and the close-quarters of decadent prose, it may simply be that centuries are like rolls of celluloid film, the revolutions coming faster and more furiously with the spool's last frames. The danger of moving briskly toward a telos of superiority is that keeping up the pace – *garder la cadence* – may very well prove debilitating. Nervous exhaustion and degeneration into physical depletion are risks incurred with dabbling in projects of promethean proportions.

Chapter Three first considers certain literary examples of abhuman becomings, most importantly in the hyper-human, abject figure of Miserrimus Dexter in Wilkie Collins's The Law and the Lady, in order to initiate discussion of expanding human bodies into pathological models of uncertain hybridity, which are essentially overextended systems of unsustainable complexity. Taking up this train of thought, this chapter attempts to explore how the parameters of these noisy systems are by turns exploded and quietly dissolved in Jarry's Le Surmâle, a text which constantly confounds categories, not least through the Rabelaisian tones of its premise(s) which alternatively rises skyward (proudly erect), and sinks below the belt. Jarry's is a text of such bloated proportions that it cannot be contained. The Surmâle seems to be without known dimension, while unmistakably within, which may be the definition of infinity, the ultimate limit of the body which cannot be referred to as human.

Following the unlimited potential of the man-machine, Chapter Four returns to the idea that the structures of buildings and bodies (as organic housing projects) work to regulate and organize physical and psychic space. Furthermore, considering body

and mind as mapped-out rooms in a haunted house (Thurschwell 15) suggests that if a floor plan could be obtained, spaces may be reinterpreted, designated for different purposes, inhabited or vacated at will. Scientists theorized that decoding the mind of the individual would provide interpretative tools for understanding collective behavior, in the hopes of eradicating pathological variants. Women, considered more sensitive and pliant subjects, often became the locus of such study and experimentation, their bodies and minds thus appropriated – or more accurately inhabited – by science, in a desire to sculpt the female body’s scale into something more navigable, and more familiar.

Scholarly treatments of the nineteenth-century conceptualization of hysteria typically interpret the (male) doctor’s study and manipulation of the (generally) female hysterical body as an act of appropriation. The body of the hysteric is thus possessed, very much as a property might be, and is simultaneously primed for inscription, becoming a powerful tool for recording the scientific progress and the insuppressible voices of its leading men. The hysterical body thus becomes the locus for both aphonia and the dislocated sound of ventriloquistic animation. Chapter Four considers how the voice – or lack thereof – becomes a point of convergence on which the blueprints for body building can be mapped out in George Du Maurier’s bestseller Trilby and Jules Verne’s Château des Carpathes, simultaneously plotting the trajectory of woman towards the status of technological apparatus, through the discourse of pathology. As Trilby’s magnificent, architectural vocal apparatus is appropriated by the vile musical genius Svengali through mesmeric influence, and the diva La Stilla is given new life as

a phantasmatic projection in Verne's text, the female body becomes a devocalized, ephemeral, inhabited space resonant with both silence and borrowed noise, a construction which is conspicuously *unsound*. The intimate linking of the soul with the ability to speak for oneself is also addressed, which raises some doubts as to the viability of "soul" as a component of the fragile human equation, since it is dependent on the structural integrity, physical and mental, of the speaker.

While it is important to acknowledge the gendered readings which the various texts discussed must necessarily illicit, this project deviates from what has become an established critical approach in that it does not directly build issues of femininity and masculinity into its nucleus. Ignoring these issues entirely would be a minefield, and they are certainly addressed. However, emphasis, pertaining to sexuality specifically, lies with "the radical and intimate *coupling* of bodies and machines" (Seltzer 13), and models of reproduction which disengage from the heterosexist norm. Imagining an erotics divorced from gendered or even human bodies is a dangerous practice that presumes, as Judith Halberstam astutely asserts, that "there is an outside to sexual and gender binaries" which ignores "the realness of gendered and sexualized bodies" (185). Cyberfeminist Sadie Plant has suggested that we operate in a system that is clearly still too optimistic about the male natural body. "Humanity," she writes, "tends towards the organized body, the body with organ, the male member" (462). This dissertation tows these observations in its undercurrent but is more concerned with the way bodies and machines collide into textual systems of identity formation which push insistently

against constraints of time and scale to form palimpsestic models of “natural,” social and mechanical (dis)orders. Gender is part of the chaos and complexity.

If the greater part of the body of this work was molded like flesh in a corset, I allowed Chapter Five to shape itself, in a somewhat ironic attempt to work my way into autopoietic endeavor. My prose got swept up with the ebb and flow of a discussion that felt very much out to sea, loud with the *noise* which Michel Serres writes of so evocatively, and which would become central to my reading of Marcel Schwob, and to the synthesis of this project. Navigating the *fin de siècle*, I felt the constant lure of writing in French, which I sometimes resisted, but it was like resisting the pull of the tide, and so I let myself go under when it became imperative. In alluding to a passage from Agnès Lhermitte’s study of Schwob, for instance, writing “*à la façon dont Lhermitte l’entend*” has far more resonance in discussing texts saturated with sound than simply saying “the way in which she means or intends it.”<sup>4</sup>

The continued, palimpsestic project of rewriting – in fact, rewiring – previous arguments in different ways took on specific relevance in relation to Schwob. I wanted the surface of my text to be as heterogeneous with references as the body of his work, or to at least approximate a Schwobian aesthetic. Picking up and synthesizing elements of the previous chapters also contributed to creating a layered argument, one that simultaneously established the different levels of the theoretical edifice while leveling them to a common speculative space to the point where the artificial is considered far superior to the natural and infinitely preferable, complicating the very

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<sup>4</sup> This point will be developed in Chapter Five (189).



idea of authenticity – or a space divided into conjectural cubicles located within earshot of each other’s *noise*.

The choice of texts alluded to is based on what I perceived as the presence of parallel components and symmetrical qualities – essentially geometrical relationships. The fact that length was a unifying factor did not seem illegitimate. That the selected stories are short points to correspondences in scale, to an environment in which elements collide with resonating impact.

Chapter Five meanderingly explores a dimension of sound that exceeds technological mechanism, while acknowledging the importance of the device through which it is disseminated, or dissimulated as the case may be. Using Michel Serres’s discussion of “*noise*” as a central, guiding paradigm, this chapter explores ideas of sound and the *unsound* at the nucleus of fin-de-siècle texts that employ various apparatus to critique social mechanisms and scientific progress, specifically by undermining the idea of authenticity in a display of counterfeit and palimpsestic textual strategies. What emerges in response to misplaced positivism is not a negative conjectural space, but rather a blank space, a ground zero saturated with the white noise of the elliptical operations of men and machines which shape the contours of a vast, chaotic and complex literary system, a system whose scale finds symmetrical expression in the search for origin, inevitably complicated by the multiplicity of myths, theories and voices at its foundation.

It should be addressed that not all texts under consideration, whether in the fifth chapter or previous chapters, qualify as decadent, despite the term’s acknowledged

slipperiness. Indeed, it is the very deliquescence of the decadent text that allows other established genres, such as sensation fiction or early science fiction, to be discussed convincingly, if not entirely comfortably, in its disquieting presence. Decadence itself often wanders idly into the literary landscape of Symbolism, displays elements of Gothic convention, expresses its debt to Romanticism, and in some instances – as in the specific texts here discussed – demonstrates a predilection for the sort of subject matter at the core of what would later be commonly and almost affectionately referred to as “Sci Fi.” An author such as Villiers de l’Isle-Adam who is accepted and classified as decadent operates in the same general fantastic space, if on occasionally wildly varying levels, as E.T.A. Hoffmann or H.G. Wells, for instance. The discourse of man’s intersection with machine being so profoundly anchored in nineteenth-century thought, it was necessary to select the texts discussed strategically, so that the edifice conceived of these evocative collisions could be built following a model recognizable to a contemporary readership. Simply put, Villiers’s *Hadaly*, Jarry’s *Surmâle*, Du Maurier’s *Trilby*, and Verne’s *La Stilla* correspond to recognizable prototypes of cybernetic organisms, or of humans augmented by either technological or psychic apparatus. What are broadly referred to in this dissertation as the *contes à appareils* and all supplementary texts are examples of body and machine amalgamations or encounters. The selection of the body as the specific locus of study, whether it is in the foreground or being towed in the undercurrent, was a necessary choice designed to situate the unescapable materiality of self-creation, the building of self with a distinctive set of technological tools. The tightly-wound, densely packed texture of the

textual body and its covert companion, the body of text, resonates into the crowded space of the modern polis and more broadly into the greater social environment, however constrictively near or myopically distant.

One may wonder why such Romantic texts as Hoffmann's "Sandman" or Mary Shelley's Frankenstein – which seem to fit neatly alongside other texts at the foundation of a modern mythology of artificial man through their evocative portrayals of automatism and the composite body – are not positioned more prominently in this study. The decision to reference these works in passing, according to relevance, rather than to provide an in-depth study of their content, stemmed from the perception that while some of the texts studied clearly owe a significant, often acknowledged debt to both Hoffmann and Shelley, the content and the form of the fin-de-siècle treatment of man, machine and the accompanying promethean speculation varies significantly from earlier considerations in its density of language, in its expression which is by turns febrile and languorous, and perhaps most significantly in its access to and use of rapidly evolving technologies. The late nineteenth-century text thus seems to resonate more decisively with the freneticism of a twenty-first-century perspective, while challenging our flagging, occasionally flailing, attention spans.

The vacillation between England and France in the choice of texts may also be questioned. Improved European transportation technologies contributed substantially to the efficiency of cultural exchange. To some extent, national boundaries were becoming more fluid as developing railway networks shortened the gap between the country and sprawling urbanity. Perhaps most relevantly to this study, the installment

of a telephone line, made possible by underwater cables, between England and France in 1891, effectively annihilated distance, situating these two nations on opposite ends of a single, technological feat.<sup>5</sup> It almost seems imperative to communicate with the textual environment on either side of the Channel, while simultaneously seeming reductive as the importance of geographical space and division wanes. Selecting works from two specific nations offers a somewhat funneled vision of nineteenth century men and machines, a peephole view of a pervasive preoccupation with and incorporation of the mechanical. One could easily have included German texts, for instance, or considered a transatlantic approach. Friedrich Kittler's influential Discourse Networks, 1800/1900 indeed engages authors, fictional and otherwise, who span the breadth of (over) a century and a continent. The common point of convergence, however, is that the textual examples utilized in Kittler's post-hermeneutic approach serve to stress the body's importance as "the site upon which the various technologies of our culture inscribe themselves" (Wellbery xiv). Kittler's conception of the multiple and layered bodily system provided a guiding structure for my own discussion of bodies and machines. While Kittler devotes several pages to Bram Stoker's seminal, technologized text Dracula, I was rather delighted to note the relative brevity of the entry for Villiers's L'Ève future. Kittler's Discourse Networks is unquestionably the work that builds systems theory quite literally and literarily into bodies most thoroughly and evocatively. The transient presence of a decadent canon, and the virtual absence in Kittler's important study of other arguably technologized

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<sup>5</sup> See Sylvie Young, Les Scandaleuses rêveries du célibataire fin de siècle 100.

genres – sensation fiction, for instance – provided an exciting opportunity to explore other layers of a social system which sites the body at its nucleus, and to understand the complexity of navigating its textual network, while hopefully elucidating certain epistemological pathways.

Because the body and the specific technologies upon which it is contingent are so essential to this study, certain texts which intersect bodies and machines more loosely, or which hover in the realm of, for instance, technologies of sound but resonate hollowly for the purposes of this dissertation, were necessarily excluded from the main body of the text but deserve mention here. Remy de Gourmont's short-story "L'automate" which begins by positing humans as clockwork and conscience as its "sonnerie" (Histoires magiques, 57), could easily have been discussed alongside Jules Verne's Maître Zacharius or Villiers's L'Ève future in its depiction of the mechanical "nature" of man – or more precisely, woman – and the ensuing descent into madness, with homo (Gourmont) or suicidal (Villiers) results. Gourmont's text, however, rests on the premise of the imagined, deceiving perception of mechanism, contrary to Villiers. Pushing the study of madness and automatism beyond the limits of this thesis, one could certainly convincingly explore the mechanical facets of the infernal descent into madness, starting perhaps with the visual essay which survives from the Salpêtrière's heyday of hysterical studies, and spreading out both backward and forward from there. Gourmont also wrote a rather obscure little piece entitled "Le Phonographe," which is little more than a *nature morte*, albeit an interesting one, of

this particular technology, in my opinion, but which is tellingly dedicated to “*M. Edison* (de l’Ève future)” (*Histoires magiques*, 217).

Breaking free from the strict confines of intimate encounters between bodies and machines, the nineteenth century is rich with technological fantasy, with texts that playfully, dangerously, satirically, enthusiastically or pessimistically explore the mechanisms of the social, the implication of an evolving or devolving – as the perspective may have it – macrocosm. There is space to explore the pursuit of the Ideal and human fallibility in such texts as Yveling RamBaud and Dubut de Laforest’s story of human artificial insemination, put forward as a lucid articulation of real scientific development,<sup>6</sup> *Le Faiseur d’hommes* (1884) which perhaps finds a slight correspondence of intent, if it falls considerably short of the stylistic or tonal dexterity of an earlier work from across the Atlantic, Nathaniel Hawthorne’s short-story “Rappaccini’s Daughter” (1844). Hawthorne’s contemporary Edgar Allan Poe, aside from providing inspiration for a fin-de-siècle literary circle introduced to his works in part through Charles Baudelaire’s translations, participates in debates surrounding automatism, and the related topic of mesmerism, situating him as a precursor to Du Maurier and Conan Doyle, particularly with such stories as “Mesmeric Revelation” (1844) and “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar” (1845), in which mesmerism induces communication from beyond the grave, to enlightening effect in the former and horrifying abjection in the latter, and his 1836 essay “Maelzel’s Chess

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<sup>6</sup> See Georges Barral’s preface to RamBaud and Dubut’s *Le Faiseur d’hommes* ix.

Player,” which exposed the fraudulent mechanisms of the celebrated automaton referred to as “the Turk” built in 1769.

Those interested in Victorian treatments of automata may look to Jerome K. Jerome’s Hoffmanesque short-story “The Dancing Partner” (1893) and to selected works of Charles Dickens, as Katharine Inglis has astutely pointed out in her essay “Becoming Automatous: Automata in The Old Curiosity Shop and Our Mutual Friend.” Inglis notes the broader resonance of “paradoxical figure” of the automaton, stating that it “has been used as an analogy for both normal and pathological behaviours, as a paradigm and a warning, as a benchmark against which humans are measured and found wanting and as the symbol of all that is reactive, affectless and inhuman” (1). As such, fired as he is from a literary canon, Dickens joins the dissonant ranks of a more obscure group of individuals obsessed with the allure of the artificial, and possessed by the mechanisms of a form of textual madness. I am not suggesting, however, that Dickens was a decadent, only that what were thought of as the tainted texts of a cultural underbelly are perhaps not marginal but located in the saturated center of a discourse concerned with the human relationship to industry and technology.

That the word “automaton” is derived from the greek *automatos*, meaning self-moving, (Sirois-Trahan 194) or to move without the instigation or intervention of others, also positions automata, and by extension selected nineteenth-century texts into which they are implicitly built, within a broader environment of self-creation, which is contingent on the vacillations of the “spark” that connects body and mind, if such enlightened distinctions may still be assumed. This larger, more complex environment

should theoretically simplify the delineating features of the automaton who moves systematically within it, except that by participating in a form of autopoiesis, the automaton complicates ideas of reactivity versus activity and the already deliquescent distinctions between animate and inanimate. This dissertation does not provide a history of automata, which can be enjoyed in Gaby Wood's Living Dolls, nor does it specifically discuss such famous eighteenth-century examples as Vaucanson's duck or Von Kempelen's "Turk." However, the popularity of mechanical automata and the corresponding debates on the origins of the soul and, as the nineteenth century became acclimatized to Darwinism, of human life, underpin the evolution of textual representations of the (wo)man-machine. Automatism lies provocatively at the foundation of the coupling - recalling Seltzer's term - of bodies and machines, an intimacy which might best be described, as the nineteenth century drew to its decadent close, through an invented, fandangled word: *inanimacy*.

The additional works of fiction alluded to in this introduction are certainly not meant to provide an exhaustive account of nineteenth-century portrayals of an increasingly mechanical and technological age, but rather to suggest that there are many rooms yet to be explored in the edifice constructed of identity, and which may perhaps be navigated through systems theory. Building in the spaces between the concrete structure of the body and its analogical expression, identity, ideas about individual and social mechanisms become as articulate as the fibrous connective tissue that makes movement – backward or forward (the direction is of little relevance) – possible. Articulate bodies and articulate constructs – occasionally disturbingly



disjointed, as at the fin-de-siècle – are often the direct result of the complex nineteenth-century interplay between scientific and literary texts, and a wide array of complimentary disciplines.

In terms of invoking a variety of Victorian conceptions of and reactions to technological progress, Herbert Sussman's Victorians and the Machine is, if somewhat outdated, still a useful survey of the literary response to technology from Carlyle to Kipling. Sussman's continuing work in this area has proved to be an excellent starting point for further research, as has Jacques Noiray's enlightening two volume study of literary representations of the machine in French literature, Le Romancier et la Machine. Noiray's comprehensive discussion of the many themes and influences in Villiers's L'Ève future in his book-length study of this work, L'Ève future ou le laboratoire de l'idéal, opened many avenues of my own enquiry into Villiers's work. While Noiray does not utilize systems theory, his lucid discussion of the desire for an unattainable Ideal that resides at the core of the conception of the technical object, as well as his exploration of the nineteenth-century environment that contributed to the genesis of science fictions, provided a rich resource from which I scavenged and extracted the initial drafts of several arguments in the following pages.

On the level of concretizing reflections on the incorporation of technology, on the way in which the body literally operates as a site of inscription, as an interface between not only interior and exterior, but the fugitive space between self and other, I am greatly indebted to Felicia Miller-Frank's The Mechanical Song, Marie Lathers's The Aesthetics of Artifice, Claire Kahane's Passions of the Voice, Janet Beizer's

Ventriloquized Bodies and the corpus of Asti Hustvedt's work on the hysterical resonances of Villiers's L'Ève future. A further point of convergence in these studies is their emphasis on sound, particularly the voice's intimate connection with our conception of the soul. In this respect, John Picker's Victorian Soundscapes provides a thorough detailing of nineteenth-century developments in sound technology, including the evolving attitudes and shifting inflections of its auditors. It was through these texts, primarily, that I was able to situate the soul's liminal position at the threshold of both technology and pathology, and to derive from this shared space an idea central to my work, that of the *unsound* structure.

The exchange between crumbling edifice and structural integrity which I felt needed to be addressed if the stability of established hierarchies was in question, or if the very foundations of individual and social identification (the process by which we assess our own methods of operation) were slowly rotting, took the analogical form of the ruin, which suggested the process of building down (excavation) and eventual (re) building up (formation). Thus plotting bodies and machines became an architectural and archeological endeavor originating at a shared point and moving systematically in what seemed like opposite directions but was in reality just the negative (white) and positive (charged) spaces of a common myth of modern identity. The idea of the ruin came through a reading of Elizabeth Bronfen's Over Her Dead Body. Although Bronfen's study is of a Western nineteenth-century aesthetic of feminine death, and is not overtly concerned with technological developments, her discussion of ruins as representing unstoppable decay and the morbid proposition that "life is from the start a

ruin” (242), eventually led, in conjunction with Jean-Louis Schefer’s consideration of origin myths in his essay “La Pudeur d’Adam,” to my own understanding of the nineteenth-century technological fantasy as an attempt to dispel human degeneration by supplanting it with the gleaming mechanisms of progress while simultaneously acknowledging the impossibility of such an endeavor and succumbing to inevitable, irreversible dissolution. Although this formulation is not original to my work, as evidenced in a panoply of essays from William Leiss’s “Technology and Degeneration: The Sublime Machine” to those collected by Constable, Denisoff and Potolsky in Perennial Decay, the ruin and its biological equivalent, the relic, do not provide commonly exploited analogical imagery for texts which discuss fin-de-siècle collisions between bodies and machines, and yet these texts are often replete with fragments and parcellated figures. As such, ruins and relics became important cogs in my theoretical wheel, particularly as they relate to the idea of an already crumbling sense of constructed, technologized origin.

Laying systems theory at the foundation of a study of late-nineteenth-century literature is not entirely without precedent. The implied and occasionally overt influence of such an approach can be detected in the work of Hayles and Kittler, and of course, as aforementioned, in Livingston, although Livingston’s Between Science and Literature is concerned with laying the “*groundwork*” for an “autopoetic” project (1) and while certain nineteenth-century texts are discussed, they are neither in the foreground of a project that focuses on building a solid methodological platform for approaching literary studies autopoetically, nor overtly fin-de-siècle, although the late-

nineteenth is referenced.<sup>7</sup> Elements of the irrepressible abstraction that becomes the dogged companion of efforts to synthesize science's relationship to literature at the fin de siècle are perhaps most evident in the sinews of language and rigor of thought in the works of Michel Serres, Michel Carrouges, and Michel Pierssens. That these authors share a common first name is not lost on me, and despite my best efforts, I came to refer to them as the "corpus of Michel," as though their work forms a single, if heterogeneous, textual body. This is, of course, a fallacy, but many images that became leitmotifs of my dissertation, such as mirrors, *dispositifs* or the visible traces of sound, many equivalences that eventually made themselves manifest - the drone of the crowd and white noise, voice so small they trespass into silence, individual bodies and social bodies, the superlative and the infinite, sense and nonsense which leads indirectly back to sound and the unsound, to the integral and the unintelligible - existed, directly or indirectly, in some sort of primordial or evolved form in the lines and spaces of these texts, and perhaps in their exchange.

That critical studies of the fin de siècle which exceed more straightforward historical accounts are widely available is a testament to the surge of interest in decadent literature, which has continued to gain momentum since the publication, mostly in the 1990s, of a number of anthologies of primary texts and literary essays which effectively drew a bridge between the ends of centuries. Some of these collections, for instance The Decadent Reader (1998) edited by Asti Hustvedt, provided

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<sup>7</sup> See for instance Livingston's discussion of "life" as the "tragic hero of the late nineteenth century" and the advent of twenty-first-century "transnational neoliberalism" (138).

an English readership access to an otherwise obscure set of French texts, some of which were translated for the first time. The timely publication of many works contributing to what had previously been a relatively lean discourse does raise questions about synthesizing and staging *fins* across a precisely calculated chasm of chronological time.

Interpreting the effect of distance retraction that followed nineteenth-century developments in sound (Schuerewegen 10) into an idea of the elasticity of time and scale initially evolved through a reading of Franc Schuerewegen's À Distance de voix. Schuerewegen's discussion of Villiers, Verne and Schwob and his explicit linking of these texts through sound technology to Michel Serres's concept of *noise*, was what initiated the transfer of the shortening or abolition of physical distances and the tumultuous chaos of increasing environmental sound resulting directly from technological development to a concept of scale as something infinite in the white noise of its unintelligibility and time as a factor of little relevance when distances become of unnavigable magnitude. The infinitely large and the infinitely small thus also become equivalents, individual scale proportionately as difficult to navigate as the social sphere in which it operates but by which it is hardly contained, invisible as it sometimes seems to the naked eye. To get a good view on the smallest of scales, the eye must be augmented by a clever prosthesis.

Most importantly, in an elliptical return to an autopoietic paradigm, time and scale regulate themselves at the foundation so that they may resonate more vociferously throughout every level of existence. And what, in the end, is existence, if

not a series of operations designed to delay an inevitable conclusion, a series of operations performed against a backdrop of consuming and contagious desire for the highest levels of an abstract, a series of operations undertaken through every artificial means known or imagined to preserve the individual being from its own imminent decadence?

**Chapter One:**  
**Architectural Articulations: Framing Late-Nineteenth-Century Fantasies of  
Bodies and Machines**

## **Preliminaries: Non-Innocent Acts of Textual Framing**

Why framework? Framework narratives – what I would also qualify in a non-inclusive singular as academic discourse – are difficult to elaborate because determining the framework's shape, size, material, type, species is difficult enough without having to consider the where and the when that it occupies in what I guess should be referred (or deferred) to as n-dimensional space. My assumption is that whether the academic articulation takes the form of pontification or radical provocation, the strings of the argument are tangled up in a dense theoretical network that discredits, to a certain extent unknowingly, actors that opt out of participating in the established or recursively emergent intellectual activity. The elaborate discursive corsetry that results from the more or less slow constriction of the academic body of knowledge thus appears to bind further argument, influencing its shape and movement quite literally. I do not, however, mean to sound negative about this theoretical costume party or the company with which one is meant to interact during any given soirée because my assumption is also that no body wants to loosen the strings at night, if it means trading a lavish intellectual affair for the passing relief of indulging in an interior monologue of bedtime stories. I myself prefer to keep the getup and swallow my stimulants in order to last until some outline of illumination dawns on me.

I am not convinced that elaborating on the corset as my analogical mechanism is useful because it is most provocative when worn without a barrage of apologetic explanation. Nevertheless, if I am going to lay myself, by fleeting glimpses, bare, then I should mention that I am choosing to outright ignore the gendered implications and



the questionable usage of such a device, in the hopes that someone else will not and will read it for what it is meant to be – bad taste. Bad taste is a particularly adaptable strategy because if its usurper chooses to err on the side of irony, sarcasm and derision can be upended by self-ridicule, which is far more convivial. Bad taste therefore allows for some flexibility and wiggle room within closed and pleasantly crowded discussions.

But why framework? And why opt out of an explicit use of verb in this formulation? Simply to refuse the attribution of any particular agency, and because there is no room for distinctions of activity or passivity. However, if there were some margin for maneuvering, perhaps a more entertaining turn of phrase would be why frame work? What has innocent verbiage done to deserve it? Does not the body of work regulate itself along Foucauldian lines without needing to be incarcerated for intellectual crimes it participates in unwittingly and without the faintest shred of uncommon sense? Let us assume that a frame functions much in the way that boundaries are understood to function across what can arguably, or not, be called postmodern discourse. In this scenario, the frame can belong either to the work or to the environment from which it is made distinct by the frame. As such, no party can claim particular ownership of the frame, and the frame itself becomes an illustration – not to say ideological imperative – of self-ownership or mastery over self, which is an ambiguous and somewhat uncomfortable place to be in a world that likes to separate the masters from the slaves. Awkwardness, however, is perhaps one of the more charming characteristics of framed work. Who is ever completely singular, natural and

oneself at a party, even when immediate recognition is deferred by a costume? I have been led to believe that there is a sort of impossibility to achieving single-minded, seamless identity; that the best one can hope for is a facade composed of hairline fractures discreetly sutured into a convincing semblance of homogeneity. Of course if one hopes for the worst, all the better.

It should be added that framing work is an inevitability because while the words that are employed and deployed across a text may be relatively innocent in the sense that they do not immediately direct their own agency or intervene actively in their signification, their arrangement into coherent patterns with a specific purpose never is. Therefore a word or two, or even several, may get away scot-free, but a body of work is always framed.

If it turns out that the frame does not belong to itself – which is plausible if the frame is the major contributor to the process of incrimination – where does it belong? Is it an outside or an inside job, or is this distinction obsolete, gone the way of the dodo, extinguished? Is the frame expected to be silent, to follow the work around in understated suppression; meant to be ignored but required to turn itself in if the final analysis goes wrong? In any case, the frame is what allows for the reconstitutive sketch of the body of work, whether or not this body is actively or passively unaware of its cosseted association with a prolific theoretical model. Under such circumstances, the more relevant way to observe questions of framework may be to question what kinds are available, and how rather than why work can be framed. Under consideration, then, are frameworks that move to an arguably similar beat as the

movement under consideration – the movement, not in the sense of a Movement, but in the sense of movement<sup>8</sup> (swaying, drifting, erratic, staccato, however it wants to be described) – referred (or deferred) to as decadent or fin-de-siècle, and more specifically to science fictitious collisions between bodies and machines. Is the movement dense; does the movement dance; how does the movement behave in social situations where it associates with paroxysms of identity?

Why the preliminaries? Partially because anyone expecting brevity from a decadent text should abandon ship, but mostly because without them building a climax is a much more labor-intensive and possibly more profoundly boring affair.<sup>9</sup> The period of theoretical courtship is where one flirts with terms that will be elucidated later. It is no surprise that nothing above is innocent, that the motives are always ulterior, and that there is even some clandestine association of ideas flung out like a fisherman's net against the blank horizon, the wide-open space of conjecture. If the result is a rather small catch wiggling in the fishnet, as it were, well that is no surprise either. In any case, much of the words adrift above will recur in various states below,

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<sup>8</sup> Asti Hustvedt's statement that "a fully developed decadent movement or school never actually existed," problematizes, as was mentioned in my introduction, attempts to define decadence (Introduction to *The Decadent Reader* 13). Because my project in this first chapter is framing decadence rather than defining it, my problem is rather defining movement in a space where there is little room for it. Movement consequently needs to develop more flexibly in this context.

<sup>9</sup> Interesting here would be a consideration of the sense in which Arthur Kroker interprets Heidegger's notion of profound boredom as the emptiness that is "the real seduction of digital culture," and which anticipates the "virtualization of the human" (61). Giorgio Agamben reads profound boredom as "the metaphysical operator in which the passage from poverty in the world to world, from animal environment to human world, is realized" (68). Clearly profound boredom has its uses, even if I choose not to use them here.

and this recursive gesture is undoubtedly part of the behavior expected of polite society.<sup>10</sup> Behavior, too, can be framed.

Before considering eligible frameworks, quotation marks need to be dispensed with as a high profile framing system within this environment. Those who have seen David Lynch's film Mulholland Drive will understand what I am driving at if they recall the rehearsal and the subsequent audition of the Betty Elms character. When Betty rehearses her scene in the apartment, her performance is wooden and hollow. At the actual audition, Betty loads the same words with uncanny sexual tension, completely transforming the scene. When words are contained between quotation marks, their performance shifts from the apartment to the audition to vice versa, or even back to the apartment. Quotation marks navigate rich networks of meaning by engaging citation, innuendo, connotation, multiplicity, idiom, blatant finger-pointing, and then some, in what is arguably redundant activity. If I recover fragments from the above text and contain them within quotation marks, we understand that "articulation," "closed," "association," "networks," "meaning," "activity," "complex," and even "the," "is" and "in" have not been used innocently and demand to be rendered differently according to their location within the theoretical multiplex spotlighted by these marks. I believe, however, that we are already aware of the complex relationships in which our choices of terminology engage themselves, undoubtedly with the eventual desire of committing to a binding agreement as to what the best way to interpret them is. It

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<sup>10</sup> We could discuss the recursive in the same space, and in other perhaps contextually less appropriate words, as Judith Butler discusses an act, not as a "singular and deliberate" gesture, but rather as a reiterative process that "mimes the discursive gestures of power." She adds that "it is the power of this citation that gives the performative its binding and conferring power" (225).

would consequently seem useful to punctually release as many words as possible from their fetters, if only to better entrench them irremediably within a discursively penal complex. The assumption should therefore be that every thing is contained within quotation marks that are invisible to the naked eye, and thus subject to the composite imaging of multiple non-innocent signification. Any quotation marks in visible attendance will serve to single out extraordinary singularity of meaning, face value; or conversely meaning so nebulous that it does not refer to anything, or infer anything, but itself. For the sake of clarity, excerpts from works cited will also be contained within quotation marks – the only frame acceptable when they are possessed by another body of work – although their contextual role will primarily be to indicate the source’s location on the outside of this text. Whether this can be done successfully, or even just convincingly, is undoubtedly a valid question.

If my style gets drier at this point, it is simply getting acclimatized. If that is an indication that the weather is fine, then there is nothing, as before, to stop me camping out.

I am now in a position to consider how work can be framed by mulling over what framework is and what kinds are available. Should we think of a frame as in frames of film?<sup>11</sup> Is it more likely that we are in an art gallery, catching glimpses of bare wall between more or less elaborate frames? Should we imagine the construction

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<sup>11</sup> In part XIII of “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” Walter Benjamin talks about film’s ability to alter the dimensions of space and movement, adding that the enlargement of a frame (“snapshot”) “reveals entirely new structural formations of the subject” (1181).

of a framework for a building where the insides spill themselves out?<sup>12</sup> Would it be more useful to think of this construct as spatial – as a series of negotiated spaces? Were we to develop a blueprint for this study, would its specifications resemble those of the maps drawn by the cartographers of Lewis Carroll or Jorge Luis Borges; in other words, would it be drawn in a scale of 1:1? If so, how would we take the measurements of the body of work to be simulated, and how would we make language express these dimensions in any legible way?<sup>13</sup>

Developing these sorts of abstractions is missing a step or three, however. The theoretical climate, in which any kind of conjecturing on late-nineteenth-century fantasies of bodies and machines would make sense, needs first to be assessed.

### **Mapping Systems Theory and Edifices of Self-Construction**

I have had the image of a Venn diagram with me for a long time. Several of its properties appeal to me: supposedly distinct worlds overlapping into a space in which

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<sup>12</sup> In discussing the reception of the Eiffel Tower upon its completion in 1889, Stephen Kern states that “traditional distinctions between inside and outside were useless to describe this open structure. Visitors who descended the spiral staircase were outside but at the same time “within.”” Similarly, he points out that William Le Baron Jenny’s Leiter Building in Chicago, built from 1889 to 1891, “was the first purely skeletal building without any supporting walls” where the “interior skeletal structure” is put on display (185-86). Useful here is an architectural illustration of the ambiguous vacillation between the positions occupied by inside and outside, particularly in edifices that squeeze nicely into the timeframe which supports this study. Niklas Luhmann, quoting Kandinsky, highlights a similar strategy in his systems theory, particularly as it applies to the art system: “*each form also has an inner content. Form is the externalization of this inner content.*” Form here functions as a “limit,” or frame, allowing for speculation on whether “externalization” can be described more precisely as “the crossing of a boundary” (*Art as a Social System* 27).

<sup>13</sup> The reference here is to Lewis Carroll’s *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded* and Jorge Luis Borges “Of Exactitude in Science.” In “The Precession of Simulacra,” Jean Baudrillard goes beyond this example from Borges’s tale in suggesting that simulation no longer has any real point of reference. Devoid of origin, the “hyperreality” of the simulation erases the distinction between copy and original, rendering both artificial (166). See also Hayles 60.

elements are shared (I sometimes think of this as the common ground, the schoolyard of postmodernism); the floatation of these different spheres in a larger environment, the dimensions of which can be exact or unspecified; the distinctness of its various permeable boundaries; the chaotic dispersion of the seemingly weightless elements; the sheer simplicity of it, which reminds me that in my elementary school days, Venn diagrams sketched imprecisely in a copybook by pencil were perfectly acceptable and even considered accurately representational.

As much as I would have loved to use this diagram as the frame for my work, my conception of it is hopelessly deficient. If I were to pun on the word Venn, however, I might suggest that the diagram be renamed Vein, in allusion to the network of vessels that course through the human body. In this pastiche, full of contradictory elements and probably unsustainable, I could take my cue and indulge in an additional visual pun by suggesting that the emergent figure is not a diagram at all, but a diaphragm, a fraction of a figure, crushed under the pregnant weight of ideas. Although rooted in a speculative play with certain coincidences of language, this biological analogy<sup>14</sup> introduces some of the dots that need to be connected for a really lifelike composite theoretical portrait to emerge.

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<sup>14</sup>Analogy itself is one of the dots that helps connect divergent and convergent historical-theoretical-practical elements that pertain to encounters between bodies and machines. In a chapter on Norbert Wiener, who developed the term, as well as some of the founding concepts of, cybernetics, N. Katherine Hayles describes the importance of analogy to Wiener's first wave cybernetic theory. Analogy is "constituted as a universal exchange system that allows data to move across boundaries. (...) Border crossings accomplished through analogy include the separation between flesh and world (sense perception), the transition between one discipline and another (for example, moving from the physiology of living organisms to the electrical engineering of a cybernetic machine), and the transformation of embodied experience, noisy with error, into the clean abstractions of mathematical pattern" (98).

The relationship between humans and machines hinges on the interplay between the biological and the mechanical, the abstract and the concrete. Rather than concepts paired up by dichotomy, these recurring terms are simply the different materials that may be utilized to build context. Consequently, the cogs and wheels of systems, networks, bodies and state(s) find themselves here, as at grander intellectual bashes, liaising.

In “Instead of a Preface to the English Edition,” Niklas Luhmann presents Social Systems as “a theoretical edifice (...) offered under the brand name “systems theory”” (xxxvii). For Luhmann, structure is determined by the organization of a system’s autopoietic (self-making) operations. What arises consequently is a “self-supporting construction” (Luhmann Social Systems xlix), which is circular and self-reflexive. Luhmann admits that his design of systems theory, in part an adaptation of the work of neurophysiologist Humberto Maturana and his collaborator Francisco Varela, reaches “high levels of abstraction” from which we may occasionally catch glimpses, through “a rather thick cloud cover,” of a “stretch of landscape with the extinct volcanoes of Marxism” (Social Systems l). Despite this emphasis on intangibility – Dietrich Schwanitz points out that in Luhmann’s model, systems “recognize (or can be recognized in terms of) only cognitive (i.e. nonphysical) boundaries” (153) – there is nevertheless a profusion of architectural terminology and analogy throughout the whole of Social Systems. For instance, in explaining the distinction between “system differentiation” (the formation of internal system/environment relations) and “system complexity” (the breakdown of a system into



elements and relations), he suggests that “in the former, rooms compose a house; in the latter, cinderblocks, beams, nails, and so forth do” (21).

True to my own ulterior motives, I choose to profiteer from these fortuitously worded metaphorical instances by interpreting them as a set of instructions for applying systems theory in a literal sense to the construction of a framework. Further insight into the projected layout of this project can be obtained from Luhmann’s outline of the structures of systems and environments. Reminding us of the principles of autopoietic closure, Luhmann states that “because no system can avoid chance” the “choice of structure leaves much to chance” (Social Systems 183). A blueprint for a system’s organization can nevertheless be provided; or at least a narration of the theoretical edifice, if we prefer to rely on the fluidity of oral tradition instead of the blueprint’s possibly indelible ink. Luhmann accepts “system and environment” as “the central paradigm” of systems theory<sup>15</sup> (Social Systems 176). Within that paradigm is where we should therefore begin scouting for the potential location of the flagship edifice.

Luhmann describes the “difference in relative degree of complexity” as difference that is moored to the asymmetrical relationship between system and environment, and which “forces distinct forms of handling and reducing complexity, depending on whether one is dealing with the complexity of the system or that of the

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<sup>15</sup> Which is why I choose not to elaborate other potential models, for example one of “a building that at once offers and denies observational possibilities to those inside and outside the building,” divided into “the level of first-order observation” and “the level of second-order observation” (with perhaps a communal space for close encounters with any “observer of the third order”) (Luhmann, Art as a Social System 206-07).

environment” (Social Systems 182). The system must reduce complexity in order to survive the overwhelming complexity of the environment; and the environment must handle any increases in complexity that are the offshoot of successful system reproduction (what Luhmann also calls an “evolutionary success” (Social Systems 182)).

Starting from the bottom up, the “difference in relative degree of complexity is the foundation in reality that gives the difference between system and environment a chance to succeed” (Luhmann Social Systems 183). On top of this foundation, with its concrete foothold, the “difference in relative degree of complexity can be actualized and worked out on several levels at the same time” (Luhmann Social Systems 184). These are “the *operative* level” (where an environment relevant to the system’s “causes and effects” is selected), “the level of *structure formation*” (where the relevance of the environment is “generalized, respecified, and then used to steer internal processes”), and the “level of *reflection*” (on which “the system determines its own identity by contrast with everything else”) (Luhmann Social Systems 184). As for more general building guidelines, it is “worthwhile to introduce the difference between system and environment into the system as an orienting structure” (Luhmann Social Systems 183).

The implementation of all these specifications, however, is challenging, not to say impossible, since it involves reconciling what would undoubtedly be incompatible constituents, right down to the detail work. I am not an architect, clearly, and so the vocabulary for describing such edifices of the imagination escapes me, but I suppose I would be looking at some sort of a stadium, roofless of course, in which there is a

frenzy of self-reflexive activity taking place on three levels that must each be divided into several stories (bedtime or otherwise), with partitions that operate invisibly to the naked eye but that are, unlike an electrical fence, permeable and much more friendly. The structure would have to be inordinately high and would practically have to build itself from the ground up. Each of the residents (or would they be employees? Either way the spatial occupation is temporary, if recursive) would be doctors or mathematicians, except for where the emphasis would be placed on relations rather than operations. Maybe we could allocate a designated place, necessarily on the third level, for these interactions – something like the Cloud 9 bar on the eighty-seventh floor of the Grand Hyatt Shanghai Hotel – where we would be high up enough to glimpse other edifices, during lapses in coded conversation, in the not so distant environment.

There are mixed messages involved in flirting with the idea of rooting the concrete in abstraction. Deriving meaning as it may apply to bodies and machines from architectural metaphors for theories that are necessarily already analogical can be an obscure undertaking. To elucidate the dynamic of the relationship between the biological, the mechanical, and the architectural (which arguably draws on biological mechanisms), I would like to consider Michel Feher and Mark Seltzer's conceptualization of body building. The reference here is not (at least not directly) to weights and rowing machines. Feher, anticipating a conception such as Judith Butler's in Bodies that Matter of performativity as embodied process, defines “body building” as the “different modes of construction of the human body,” which is “a reality

constantly produced, an effect of techniques promoting specific gestures and postures, sensations and feelings, and so forth.” He adds that “only in tracing these modes of its construction can one arrive at a thick perception of the present “state of the body”” (159). Seltzer, in an aggrandizement of state to State, equates “body building” with “nation building” (149). The leap from body building, to building a body, to a body building is simply a matter of reshuffling words, and as Feher and Seltzer and et al suggest, the body cannot be reduced to an accidental organization of self-perpetuating nature, but must be understood as the embodied process of identity construction.

It is unclear whether Niklas Luhmann wanted to suggest that a human being acts as an environment or as a collection of subsystems when he wrote that “a human being may appear to himself or to an observer as a unity, but he is not a system” (Social Systems 40). What he was referring to was the fact that humans cannot observe the “physical, chemical, and living processes” of their own bodies, and that, in what sounds like a Cartesian split, “the living system is inaccessible to the psychic system”( Social Systems 40). Nevertheless, whether he intended it or not, the suggestion in this statement is that there is no such thing as a homogeneous subject, and we must therefore infer that there are exterior factors that influence being human

not accounted for in closed systems theory.<sup>16</sup> Even Varela thought that turning autopoiesis into a paradigm for social systems was untenable.<sup>17</sup> Critiquing models of “cognitive architecture that abstracts (...) from the web of the living and of lived experience,” Varela believed that theory needed to be linked to the “incarnated coupling (...) which is essential to living cognition” (qtd. in Hayles 157). In the very formulation of his observation, however, is a way to develop a solution to the problem of high abstraction. Why not turn cognitive architecture literal? The suggestion that the abstract has a concrete foundation is already there. Why not make a building of it, or even a city, crammed with highrises, lowrises, and cathedrals with vaulting reminiscent of a ribcage? Bruno Latour asks “is not society built literally – not metaphorically – of gods, machines, sciences, arts and styles?” (45). And if society “has to be made, built, constructed,” Latour adds that it is unquestionably with “nonsocial, nonhuman resources” (54). I would disagree with him on the strict material specifications for this Herculean task, except that the whole premise of Latour’s We Have Never Been Modern rests on the confusion of the “work of purification” (in which human beings and nonhumans remain distinct) and the “work

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<sup>16</sup> Donna Haraway claims that “late-twentieth-century machines have made thoroughly ambiguous the difference between natural and artificial, mind and body, self-developing and externally-designed.” In some ways this sustains closed systems theory, in another way it blows it wide open. Such an ambiguous space would probably be Haraway’s preferred location for her cyborg, if such a conception could ever be contained anywhere. That Haraway was not influenced by Luhmann’s social systems theory is hardly relevant. It is the network of associated ideas and their workability across disciplines that is interesting, particularly as Haraway’s essay was originally published in 1985, and Soziale Systeme in 1984 (it was first translated as Social Systems in 1991). Perhaps these are only fortuitous and marginally relevant accidents of historical timeframe, and maybe they are not. In any case, what remains to be addressed is Haraway’s limiting of the “leaky distinction between animal-human (organism) and machine” to late twentieth century (152).

<sup>17</sup> See Hayles 154.

of translation” (in which “entirely new types of beings, hybrids of nature and culture” are created), correcting the asymmetry of modernity's stratified misconceptions of time, scale, things, people, and society (10-11).

### **Envisioning Structures of Actor-Network Theory**

The dynamics between “entities we are accustomed to call 'things'” and “those we are used to designate as 'people'”<sup>18</sup> (Shapin 538) is central to what Latour calls his actor-network theory or ANT. Humans and nonhumans alike can be actors in heterogeneous networks. “Cultures,” he adds, “do not exist, any more than Nature does” (104). The moderns' refusal to acknowledge what Latour calls, using Michel Serres's terminology, “quasi-objects” as such is what triggers “the machine for creating differences,” or for proliferating what we may qualify as unsustainable dualisms (112). The link has already been established between Latour's hybrids and Donna Haraway's cyborgs,<sup>19</sup> if there was any explicit need to defend the possible application of Latour's actor-network theory to questions of identity formation in the wake of body/machine collisions. Latour advocates retaining constructivism as a theoretical strategy,<sup>20</sup> if a starting point for building literal architectural analogies was needed. The real question is how do I construct the edifice of ANT?

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<sup>18</sup> In a review of *We Have Never Been Modern*, Andrew Pickering calls this the “practical coupling of the human and the nonhuman.” Although I will not elaborate the point here, the idea of coupling, rather than association or any other similar term, is important in suggesting the erotic dynamics of encounters between bodies and machines (258).

<sup>19</sup> See Crawford 579.

<sup>20</sup> Constructivism is what becomes of deconstruction when it loses its contrary. See Latour 134-5.

A couple of figures with which Latour attempts to clarify his arguments bear a (for me) uncanny resemblance to Venn diagrams. I am referring particularly to figures 4.2 and to parts of figure 4.3 (99, 102). In 4.3, the space labeled 3 which sits below the collapsed Venn-type diagram labeled 2 reminds me of nothing so much as drawings one creates inadvertently on an etch-a-sketch, or of that favorite game of bored high school students which consists of randomly dotting a piece of looseleaf with a pen and then trying to produce a coherent picture by connecting them. I often ended up with dragons, their bodies adapting beautifully to the spikes that inevitably result from lines that rise from one point and fall to the next. I imagine that that sort of versatile heterogeneous creature would not have been entirely inappropriate in space 3 – given that space 3 contains one of Latour's visual analogies for networks – if it had not been rooted in mythology. Concrete seems to make a better home for hybrids.

The Venn diagram is not a total misconception of my imagination. Latour writes that “if the human does not possess a stable form, it is not formless at all. If, instead of attaching it to one constitutional pole or the other, we move it closer to the middle, it becomes the mediator and even the intersection of the two.” At the other constitutional pole are assumed of course to be the nonhumans. “The two expressions 'humans' and 'nonhumans' are belated results that no longer suffice to designate the other dimension” (137). In this collapsed version of the Venn diagram, the two distinct sets disappear and what we are left with is the small area, populated with quasi-objects and quasi-subjects, in which they intersect. Can we even refer to this space as an intersection given that there is no longer any reference point that exists, outside this

framed space, on which to draw ideas of differentiation? It would be like trying to paint on a non-existent gallery wall around the one picture that is hanging conspicuously in its isolation. And what a blasphemous act that would be, however impossible.

In any case, the main feature of an actor-network edifice should undoubtedly be the coupling of human and nonhuman materials, inside and out, and right down to the foundations. The edifice would be called a collective – or would we have to call it a cooperative? – where dynamic networking, invisible to the naked eye,<sup>21</sup> would be taking place, not any more or less in any one section. The “collective,” however, is Latour's word to “describe the association of humans and nonhumans” and has the flavor of what Luhmann describes as environment (4). It is therefore hard to imagine what kind of possible landscape could exist without the actor-network structure.

The whole face of the actor-network building would, I suspect, have the look of a composite portrait, with all the unpredictability that this implies. Furthermore, blueprints are difficult to develop from somewhat simplistic, or even convoluted, diagrams and schematics, and constructing a formally unstable model is still awkward. Perhaps we should just call the edifice an ANThill, swarming with activity, where the real structural contingency is one of scale,<sup>22</sup> and leave it at that. Even as he was developing cybernetics in the 1940s, Norbert Wiener stressed the importance of size to

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<sup>21</sup> “The delicate networks traced by Ariadne's little hand remain more invisible than spiderwebs” (Latour 4).

<sup>22</sup> In Latour's actor-network theory, data “should be made up of stronger and weaker heterogeneous associations” in which “all differences are differences of scale” (Shapin 547).



a system's efficiency and complexity. Fortuitously, perhaps unsurprisingly, the example he uses to drive home the point is the comparison between the required ventilation systems for “two artificial structures – the cottage and the skyscraper” (56). He adds that “the structure of the machine or of the mechanism is an index of the performance that may be expected from it” (57). This statement resonates in a broader sense for both systems and actor-network theories. The biggest problem with mapping out the structure of a systems or network theoretical edifice is that with both feet sunk in concrete it is difficult to gain the perspective that one gets from the highest level of abstraction, and therefore even more absurdly ambitious to want to indulge the tendency to work on a scale of 1:1.

### **In-Between Spaces: The Mobile Borders Within Man and Machine**

Let us go back briefly to Cloud 9 and scan the horizon again. In the old part of town is an edifice that, considered somewhat unfashionable if not obsolete in its original style, has been reworked, restored and repeatedly adapted to suit its ever-evolving environment. Based on Marx's blueprints, Louis Althusser's edifice for the structure of society can still today be held somewhat accountable for the shape in which its subjects find themselves molded. There is no need to speculate on the edifice's framework; its outline is clear enough. It consists of an infrastructural base (where the productive forces are situated) on which rest the two floors of the superstructure (the politico-legal level and the ideological level). It is the edifice's detail work that is at this point structurally eclectic. Althusser specifies that his

architectural metaphor is one of “topography” (129). A physical locality for the edifice is therefore insinuated, even if we are dealing with a “spatial metaphor” (Althusser 129) and consequently with a negative, in-between and intangible materiality.<sup>23</sup> There is enough evidence so far to suggest that this is not a contradiction as such.

Stressing the material existence of ideology, Althusser is sited in the intersection between high abstraction and the concrete. The question is whether these were ever distinct entities to begin with. Regardless, the edifice of structuralist Marxism, headquarters of the ISA and RSA,<sup>24</sup> neither one an agency (although they are bodies intimately connected with the interior remodeling of agency), still stands, even though its “critical capital,” to borrow a phrase from Latour, “has now been disseminated into the hands of millions of small shareholders” (Latour 36). When we approach its exterior surface and realize that it is made of mirrors, we can at least truly reflect on the contours of the body before us, and even observe some of its interactions with the psychic system in the almost imperceptible changes of expression.<sup>25</sup>

In the physical structure built through the recombination of selected theoretical materials is eventually where the genial, interactive space between bodies and

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<sup>23</sup> Judith Butler suggests a link between Althusser's “modalities of matter” and the “materiality that is associated with the body, its physicality as well as its location, including its social and political locatedness” (69).

<sup>24</sup> Ideological State Apparatus (the media, schools, the family, churches, etc) and Repressive State Apparatus (the police, the military, the prison system, government, etc) respectively.

<sup>25</sup> Luhmann's suggestion that Marxism has been extinguished, if it is not extinct following an evolutionary model, can be put into question by Althusser's idea of “ideological *recognition*” as one of the functions of the ideological superstructural level. His “concrete” example for this function is the friends who knock at the door, and who when asked “ ‘Who's there?’ answer (since ‘it is obvious’) ‘It Is me.’ And we recognize that ‘it is him’, or ‘her’” (Althusser 161). In Luhmann's formulation that “the volcanoes of Marxism” are extinct (*Social Systems I*), he is nevertheless relying on ideological recognition as Althusser understands it, by assuming that we will in fact deduce that he is referring to Karl Marx, and not, for instance, Groucho.

machines will be situated. The choice of venue is influenced by the subject, which demands a body of work as densely and claustrophobically stylized as itself. It is as yet unclear whether the boundary that separates knowledge of the body and the body of knowledge belongs to one or the other, or even whether this is relevant should it turn out that there is no boundary, only interstitial space.<sup>26</sup> For Luhmann, the boundary is “what distinguishes the concept of system from that of structure” (*Social Systems* 28). It is debatable, however, whether an invisible boundary functions as a boundary at all, especially if this borderline must be cognitively acknowledged. If we define reality as “what one does not perceive when one perceives it” (Hayles, Luhmann, Rasch, Knodt, Wolfe 14), the boundary constitutes all that is strictly unreal.

According to Giorgio Agamben “the machine that governs our conception of man” (92) operates in the first place through a “mobile border within living man” (15) that divides life into significant categories such as “vegetal and relational, organic and animal, animal and human” (15). Because boundary has no real foundation, although it is cemented in ideological subjectivity, “*Homo* is constitutively nonhuman” “insofar as he has neither essence nor specific vocation” (Agamben 30). These ideas can be transcribed more neatly into the current project by a reshuffling of words lifted from Donna Haraway, who maintains that “any objects or persons can be reasonably thought of in terms of disassembly and reassembly; no 'natural' architectures constrain system design. Design is none the less highly constrained” (212). Similarly, we can safely

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<sup>26</sup> Katherine Hayles makes the link between the biological body and bodies of knowledge explicit: “the human body is understood in molecular biology simultaneously as an expression of genetic information and as a physical structure. Similarly, the literary corpus is at once a physical object and a space of representation, a body and a message” (29).

suppose that no natural architecture inhibits the framework which may be erected or taken apart to suit the occasion, but which is nevertheless corseted by the conventions of discursive revelry. Heterogeneous associations – playful and irreverent, or sober and staid – which cross the invisible line or join the dots between primary and secondary material, between first order and second order sources are expected. Social systems theory can therefore justifiably inform the way even a nineteenth-century psychic system operates through autopoietic closure, whether we think the information is accurate or not. Humans and nonhumans cohabit in the fin de siècle, not just in a postmodern environment. Latour says as much, and in so many words. The Decadent can attempt to resist ideological interpellation just as fervently as any radical twentieth century subject. The non-innocent process of framing work becomes a legitimate practice when it acknowledges its hybridity.

Whether the edifice that begins with late-nineteenth-century flirtations between bodies and machines can be coherently erected, and the surrounding environment neatly landscaped or not remains to be assessed. As has already been suggested, however, orderly homogeneity of design does not have a foothold in reality. If there are any distinctions to be made between the organic and mechanical materials available, it is perhaps only one of durability, and even durability is a concept that is not so much outdated as a-temporal. People and things come in and out of fashion cyclically, and fashion is a process of adaptation.

In a somewhat old-fashioned formulation, but one that nevertheless adequately alludes to the complex relationship between system and environment, Norbert Wiener

claims that “we have modified our environment so radically that we must now modify ourselves in order to exist in this new environment” (46). The difficulty is determining what we ourselves are – a single frame of mind out of several per second; conspicuous subjects particularly slight of frame; a composite face in an already crowded multiplicity; the cogs and wheels that throw human being into action? To construct an argument for the importance of late-nineteenth-century science fiction that fantasizes in paroxysms of hybridity is not to build a bridge of questionable solidity from the fin de siècle to contemporary culture. It is to erect an edifice that stands in the n-dimensional, a-temporal environment, and that articulates ideas about identity in the way that joints articulate movement in the human body.

**Chapter Two:**  
**Synthetic Structure: Building Origin and Identity in Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's**  
**L'Ève future**

In 1886, after appearing in fits and starts and near-completions in 3 different periodicals, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's L'Ève future is published for the first time in its entirety, and is "met with virtual silence" (Hustvedt, "Science Fictions" 498).<sup>27</sup> The unfolding of the novel in erratic, serial fashion in various cumulative versions perhaps contributed to its relegation to the obscure spaces of anonymity. More likely, the eccentric tone and dense texture of Villiers's novel is what pushed periodical editors to suspend its publication and was the reason for the public's disinterest.<sup>28</sup> According to Constable, Denisoff and Potolsky, decadence - category, if we cannot strictly speaking refer to it as a genre, to which L'Ève future has been ascribed - comes to operate as "the literary expression of biological degeneracy" (7). Hustvedt confirms this in a formulation that more closely exposes the mechanisms of Villiers's literary strategy. For her, decadent writers sought to "reflect their subjects" by employing language that "deviates from the established norms in an attempt to reproduce pathology on a textual level" ("Science Fictions" 23). There is a plot in Villiers's novel, but it hardly constitutes the nucleus. Rather, Villiers builds a modern mythology with a compact and opaque set of blueprints, which require interpretation.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Hustvedt informs us that only three critics, two of which were friends of Villiers's, bothered to mention the book ("Science Fictions" 498).

<sup>28</sup> For more information on Villiers's relationship with his editors, see A.W. Raitt's "The Life of Villiers de l'Isle-Adam," particularly the chapter entitled "The Humiliation of a Poet."

<sup>29</sup> This implies an implicit architectural structure to Villiers's work. Stephane Mallarme, speaking of L'Ève future in a conference given on the occasion of Villiers's death, picked up on this element, if somewhat intuitively. He begins: "J'avais de mon office à côté, réduit à une humilité de guide vers un edifice, mais capable d'en dire les pierres, supprimé ici toute lecture, directe ou autre que des phrases venues comme alentour" (27).

The storyline, skeleton on which the elements of Villiers's text are suspended, begins with the personage of Thomas Edison and his fatally lovesick friend Lord Ewald. Enamored of a beautiful actress named Alicia Clary whose physical perfection is only equalled in abject proportion by her common vapidty,<sup>30</sup> Ewald is on the verge of committing suicide when Edison, to repay a debt, offers an extraordinary solution to his problem and hopes, in this way, to prevent his death. Edison proposes to build an exact physical replica of Alicia, an android who will reflect every last detail of her magnificent surface, but who will be conveniently gutted of the offending psyche. Hadaly, as the android is christened, will operate through gleaming mechanical organs that will leave plenty of space for the injection of a soul that will spur the machine into sublime activity.

### **Excavating Origin, Planning Identity, Building the Social Body**

In her full-length study of L'Ève future, Marie Lathers draws a parallel between the "Haussmannization" of Paris, and Villiers's Hadaly. "Hadaly is," she writes, "in a sense, the body of this Paris; refabricated in the New World's garden of technology and meant to be delivered to the Old World, she is a new modern Eve built on the ruins of an obsolete Eden." (Lathers 56) Lathers expands the argument by suggesting that "Hadaly is also a representative body of the polis, a body that encloses the modern city not as infected entrails but as spectacle of silver, gold, and iron, an ideal exterior that

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<sup>30</sup> In her essay "On the Eve of the Future," Annette Michelson interprets Lord Ewald's perception of Alicia's body in usefully architectural terms by stating that "Lord Ewald goes on to speak of his sense of that body as a temple (it is Greek, no doubt) profaned by the spirit that now dwells within it" (7).



hides a full range of technical objects from the phonograph (the city's lungs) to electrical wires (its street lamps)" (Lathers 56). Lathers's interpretation compellingly connects the dots between the technological body and its political promise, by exposing this body as a structure in whose space urban planning is played out spectacularly as a performance of aesthetically beautiful technological triumphs.

In Gender Trouble, Judith Butler cogitates on the possibility of the body being "synecdochal for the social system *per se* or a site in which open systems converge" (168). Any unregulated exchange between system and environment (to anchor us more firmly in Luhmannian vocabulary) thus becomes a threat not only to the individual body, but also to the social structure for which it comes to stand, like a dangerous and promising understudy. In the case of a text like Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, we can imagine the social system as a monstrous entity – its permeable, composite parts stitched together visibly and tenuously – imperiously absorbing all the untidy, dangerous, unmanageable subversions of gender, identity and sexual practice, and spitting them back out, in one fluid Kristevan movement, into the unassuming neighborhood. Shelley's text itself has been likened to a formidable literary monster, unwieldy in the hybridity of its construction.<sup>31</sup> As such, Frankenstein participates in an operation – or in a series of operations – of "abhuman becoming," to borrow Kelly Hurley's term, which calls into question "the permanence and efficacy of any boundaries, most notably those erected by the "self" to maintain itself as a distinct

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<sup>31</sup> See Serin, Les artifices de l'écriture 12.

entity” (Hurley 43). Inner and outer space are therefore in constant flux, or to draw again on Kristeva, we might even say ‘reflux.’

What if, however, we were to substitute Villiers’s Hadaly for Shelley’s composite monster (and by this I mean both the text and the creature)? The shift is both subtle and drastic, because while the two texts build a Faustian fantasy that is comparable on many floors and levels, the materials used are significantly different, as is the division of space. While Asti Hustvedt refers to Hadaly as “a kind of cumulative cultural monster” (“Science Fictions” 514), it seems clear that Hadaly’s “monstrosity” is of a different order – not necessarily of a different social order, but perhaps of a different ordinance.

For Villiers, Hadaly means “ideal” in Persian. Jacques Noiray informs us that the actual meaning of the word is “*limite supérieure*” (Noiray 129). We can therefore translate Hadaly in much more geographical terms, or at least in the mathematical sense of “limit superior.” Regardless, for Villiers the construction of the future Eve is rooted in the ideal, conceivable through the ambivalent apparatus of technological advance. Beyond this, Villiers uproots a general notion of idealistic progressivism and replaces it, not with a vague, beautifully framed impression of the delightful advances of modern science, but with an ambivalent and nervously thrilling composite portrait, named the “Ideal,” that hangs devoid of framework, swept open and up by the current of technological advance, and locked into its own fearful fantasies. It is therefore not surprising that if Eve is rooted in the ideal, the Ideal’s roots, in turn, appear to extend far, far below the fragile surface of the earth.

The chapter of L'Ève future entitled “L'Eden sous terre<sup>32</sup>” begins with a more or less accurate quote from Faust: “Descends, ou monte: c'est tout un!” In this chapter, Edison and Lord Ewald descend into Hadaly's secret lair – something of a Batcave – located so far underground that it seems to be at the center of the Earth. This underground Eden is accessible through an elevator, which consists of a white slab embedded in four steel rails. Alan Raitt notes that this precarious-sounding apparatus approximately reflects the elevator system installed at the Trocadéro for the 1878 Exposition Universelle.<sup>33</sup> Self-referential strategies are spelled out by Villiers in his likening of the slab to an artificial tombstone, tangling up organic and metaphysical elements like death, heaven and hell in the web of technological reality (or at the least probability).

“L'excavation était, en effet, profonde,” reads the text, as Edison and Lord Ewald continue their descent into absolute darkness (164). The translation in the Hustvedt edition accounts for this passage as “the pit was evidently very deep,” but the sort of interpretive work that I believe is needed here is of a far more literal kind. The long tunnel through which Edison and Ewald travel, encased in the minimal structure of the elevator, takes them right into the heart of “d'opaques et humides ténèbres, aux exhalations terreuses, où l'haleine se glaçait” (Villiers, L'Ève future 164), where every glimmer of artificial or natural light is obliterated. The elevator, droning monotonously, moves so swiftly as to give its passengers the impression that they no

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<sup>32</sup> The translation here is “An Underground Eden” but *The Underground Eden* is more accurate.

<sup>33</sup> See notes to Villiers's L'Ève future 415.

longer have a foothold. In its mimicking of the process of death and rebirth into an artificial Eden of proportions so surreal as to flummox even J.K. Huymans's des Esseintes, the voyage down – or up, it's all the same – to Hadaly's universe is nothing if not a sort of descent into delightful madness.

“Freud,” writes Ira Livingston, “was not the first to mine madness for the cultural and social knowledge buried there but the first to systematize that operation” (54). The systematization would require a procedure which “involved a level-by-level clearing out of the pathogenic psychical material,” comparable to “the technique of excavating a buried city” (Breuer, Freud 143). Lathers draws attention to Freud's archaeological metaphor for psychoanalysis, pointing out that his advocating the excavation of repressed material provides a model for the “ontogenetic recovery on the individual's origins” (124). “The analyst who digs deep enough,” continues Lathers, “will find, beneath the Greek *Oedipus*, a feminine myth, and the psychoanalytic quest is a quest for origins – for the buried stone foundation of an initial structure” (125). Lathers builds on this argument, level-by-level, in order to conclude that “Freud the archaeologist has reconstructed or retouched the fragmentary ruins of woman by removing the layers of artifice and exposing a hypnotic ideal” (Lathers 126). In Lathers's assessment, biological, archaeological, architectural, pathological, and metaphorical analogies happily coexist side-by-side, participating chaotically in each other's operations. But why limit this exultant pandemonium to the hysterical female body?

That Villiers categorizes his novel's females – or feminine presences – as hysterical subject-objects is without question. Edison, in describing his *andréide*'s gait speaks rapturously about the fluidity of her movement when she goes to her knees, for example, “comme perdue en une extase mystique pareille à celle de ces somnambules que leurs magnétiseurs font poser, cataleptiquement, ou à celles que l'on obtient des hystériques en approchant, à dix centimètres de leurs vertèbres cervicales, un flacon d'eau de cerises hermétiquement bouché” (234). Alicia Clary is easily reduced to a cataleptic hypnotic state by Edison, in order to ensure her unwitting willingness – in fact, her irrepressible urge – to participate in the experiment of bringing Hadaly to life.<sup>34</sup> Most comprehensively of all is the hysterical process and all its mesmeric apparatus described in a chapter entitled “Explications rapides.” The explanations are nothing of the sort of course. Several pages are devoted to the detailing Sowana's out of body travel, fits of clairvoyance, and telepathic communication, achieved “au mépris *positif* de l'espace”<sup>35</sup> (emphasis in the original text), through her rare ability to exist in a state of vibrant torpor, allowing Edison to establish a subtle current between himself and his “grande magnétisée,” and to project his will into her (333). “J'aime mieux être en cette enfant vibrante qu'en moi,” interjects Edison earlier in the novel. “Quelle créature sublime! Elle existe de l'état supérieur où je me trouve en ce moment; elle est

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<sup>34</sup> “Les paupières de celle-ci [Alicia] se refermèrent doucement, graduellement, sur ses yeux d'aurore; ses bras, pétris en pierre de Paros, demeurèrent immobiles. (...) Lord Ewald, – qui avait vu le geste et l'effet de magnétique sommeil, – prit la main, froide maintenant, d'Alicia. (...) Oh! répondit Edison, nous naissons tous doués, à des degrés différents. (...) au moment précis où, demain, je penserai qu'il sera deux heures, nul ne saurait empêcher cette femme – sans la mettre en danger de mort – de se rendre ici, sur cette estrade, – et de s'y prêter de son mieux à l'expérience convenue.” (284-85)

<sup>35</sup> To the actual contempt of space, although here the term “*positif*” italicized is clearly a *clin d'oeil* to scientific positivism.

imbue de nos deux volontés s'unifiant en elle; c'est UNE dualité (Villiers 48). An interesting confession for a notorious inventor, whose description of himself Villiers pens as a "*Dormeur éveillé*" (70). In the edifice of origin and identity, constructed, destroyed, rebuilt and laid to ruin cyclically and systematically, where are we but in a space that defies sequestered space, floating not so much in an *état supérieur* as on an *étage supérieur*, or scuttling about beneath layers of ontogenetic material? "Nous ne sommes, en réalité, que ce que nous pouvons admirer en elles, c'est-à-dire y *reconnaître* de nous," ventriloquizes Villiers through Edison (287). So again, why limit the chaotic work of excavation to a hypnotic *female* ideal, particularly when Villiers himself, it seems, questioned such a reduction?

Jean-Louis Schefer writes that "tout mythe d'origine est un dispositif d'interprétation de ce qu'on appelle une culture" (20). Recovering coherent system operation thus appears to require the retrieval of an origin myth, the peeling away of pathologized identity layer by layer, the exposing of the raw material beneath, the building of a myth of identity level by level through the use of powerful technologies, and then the taking of a discrete glimpse of the result from a respectful distance. But what if we dig farther, take the prospecting further afield? In the disorderly free association of mixed metaphors, of vocabulary bred in different spheres, of confluences of organism and mechanism, can we not build a far more impressive structure? Jean-Louis Schefer likens the birth, or the creation of Eve to the performance of a surgery following the sedating of Adam, through "anesthésie ou sommeil hypnotique" (23). Thus reduced to an ideally cataleptic state, the operation takes place, and the result is

as striking as any subsequent reconstructive surgery. “Ève est une architecture,” concludes Schefer, interpreting the writings of Saint Augustin, “et le premier fait temporel, créature du sommeil, issue de la première nuit d’Adam” (Schefer 33).

A myth of origin, articulated as an architectural structure, can also be redirected from a theological environment to one of cellular biology, and still keep its mythological elements intact. In his scientific-literary hybrid work on what he calls “autopoetics,” Ira Livingston reminds us that “our bodies are in constant flux at the cellular level, where cells are continually disintegrating and being replicated” (78). Around and between these cells are “vast ‘empty’ spaces” (Livingston 78), which suggests a paradoxically intangible materiality, particularly as “empty” is enclosed in Livingston’s text within the parameters of inverted commas. Livingston thus likens the body to “a phoenix always rising from its ashes,” adding that “the living body is a pattern of information, a fact and a fiction, something continuously being made and unmade” (78). A form of the biological principle of cellular regeneration was not unknown in the nineteenth century, and Villiers himself incorporated this same concept into *L’Ève future*. “Pas un jour ne s’envole sans modifié quelques lignes du corps humain,” states Edison, “et la science physiologique nous démontre qu’il renouvelle *entièrement* ses atomes tous les sept ans environ,” (126) leading him to ask of Lord Ewald whether one can, in fact, ever resemble oneself, since there is, in effect, no *one* self. To the tangle of mythological, biological, physiological and informatic analogy that speculates on the veracity of identity where the notion of an original model has been discredited, we can justifiably add the architectural or even poststructuralist

image of the body as “patterns of ongoing events continually under construction” (Livingston 80), as an edifice of constantly shifting spaces occasionally subject to material constraints which builds itself up or down (it’s all the same) according to the technological flavor of the day, in an overt effort to network its environment.

It is interesting to note that, following the Second World War, a Polish mathematician named Stanislaw Ulam, in an effort to understand the living processes of biological life, suggested the breaking down of an automaton that could perform the essential biological function of self-reproduction into a grid of cells, in the hopes of illustrating in “cellular automata the foundational structure from which everything in the universe is built up” (Hayles 240). The result of this experimentation indicated that patterns were most likely to build up, modify and travel “at the boundary between ordered structures and chaotic areas” (Hayles 241). The reason for this is that within tightly ordered structures, cells are interdependent but unable to perform certain computational tasks. In chaotic areas, cells are relatively independent thus allowing for information transfer and modification, but not storage because the pattern does not persist. The boundary is therefore the fertile ground where the process of “living” takes shape before being dissolved again. Location scouting for the building up of Villiers’s mechanical fantasizing therefore turns out to be a pretty effortless affair. One must look to the periphery.



“La créature artificielle se construit (...) sur une marge,” writes Isabelle Krywkowski (9).<sup>36</sup> She adds that “[elle] allie des règnes incompatibles et se constitue selon un double mouvement, tension entre la fragmentation et la recomposition” (9). In other words, it is on the boundary that the double movement of taking apart and building back up again takes place, *ad infinitum*. This process denies a sense of origin, since the initial structure – if we can even determine that there is one – is so far removed as to seem obsolete. We may interpret this process along Benjaminian reproductive lines, except that Villiers does not limit mechanical reproduction to the creation of androids, nor is the territory unfamiliar to men. The artificial can be “assimilé, amalgamé plutôt, à l’être humain,” (Villiers, *L’Ève future* 209) with dangerous consequences. Any woman who integrates the artificial “tient plus ou moins d’une andréide” (Villiers, *L’Ève future* 209). On a more innocuous level, every day conversation, for Villiers, is produced automatically,<sup>37</sup> and every opinion we emit is “*relative* à mille influences de siècle, de milieux, de dispositions d’esprit, etc.” (*L’Ève future* 221). Fatally flawed with the enthusiastic absorption of the fashionable tendencies of her environment, Alicia Clary is described as a “simulacre de la soeur promise” (235), so far removed from the promise of any original unifying Eve as to lead Edison to exclaim “eh bien! chimère pour chimère, pourquoi pas l’Andréide elle-même?” (209).

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<sup>36</sup> This passage translates as “the artificial creature is built on a margin” but could also be translated as “the artificial creature therefore builds itself on a margin.”

<sup>37</sup> See Villiers, *L’Ève future* 226.

For Donna Haraway, “a cyborg body is not innocent; it was not born in a garden” (180). Villiers’s cyborg – as Hadaly may justly be named in Haraway’s terms, powered as she is by electricity, telepathy, and human projection – was not born in a garden either, but built deliberately in an artificial Eden, so far underground as to surface on the other side of the Earth. Dig down deep enough and you’ll dig up all sorts of things. Amongst these are undoubtedly the relics of Villiers’s *Future Eve*, retrieved cell by automatic cell, and ready to be rebuilt – or more accurately, to rebuild itself – into an analogy for the systematic process of existing and contributing to a social system. Analogy should here be understood as it was utilized by Norbert Wiener, the founder of cybernetics, as “a powerful conceptual mode that constitutes meaning through relation,” thus questioning whether “humans, animals, and machines have any “essential” qualities that exist in themselves, apart from the web of relations that constituted them in discursive and communicative fields” (Hayles 91).

This sort of leveling of the playing field is in a sense what Villiers was attempting when he has Edison excavate his *andréide*, beginning with a chapter entitled “Première apparition de la machine dans l’humanité” – as though evoking the first time *Homo sapiens* made its appearance amidst the other primates. Edison strategically and methodically describes every element of the android’s makeup, breaking her down (or building her up) into four categories: “Le Système vivant,” which includes the voice, movement, senses, etc, “ou, pour mieux dire, l’Âme,” “Le Médiateur-plastique,” a sort of metallic armor which functions as a skeleton would, “La Carnation,” which includes the animating fluid, the veins, the muscle tissue, etc,

and provides the contour of the body, and finally “L’Épiderme,” which is of course the skin, right down to the pores (213). From the composition of her interior to the development of the scent of her artificial but flabbergastingly real-to-the-touch skin, passing through the finer details of her motor ability, Villiers takes great pains to peel away the layers of the android’s make-up the way microdermabrasion sloughs off dead skin cells.

Felicia Miller-Frank points out that the android’s structures are “modeled on analogy with those of a real woman’s body; thus Edison calls the phonographs her lungs” (161).<sup>38</sup> This sort of analogizing is no more innocent in Villiers than it is in cybernetic theory. If the phonographs function as lungs, then they *are* lungs. If the “système vivant” functions as a soul, then what else could it possibly be? The sort of excavation that Edison performs on his artificial creation has a significance akin to what Walter Benjamin meant when he said that the enlargement of a snapshot “reveals entirely new structural formations of the subject” (1181). The intense scrutiny of Edison’s android provides exactly this. It is not only that we can detect the android’s laugh lines and count its pores, but also the fact that, from this close up, the difference between human and mechanical becomes highly abstract, almost irrelevant.

Furthermore, as Mary Lathers points out, Hadaly is – “like the skeleton of the modern city – the work of artists, industrial engineers, and technicians” (57). I think this statement is accurate if we (re)consider how intrinsic the bone structure is to the

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<sup>38</sup> See also Annette Michelson for a discussion of the exposing of the android’s anatomy in the context of eighteenth-century medical drawings and anatomical models (11-17).

structure's integrity and identity as a structural totality. Walter Benjamin talks about architecture as "the prototype of a work of art the reception of which is consummated by a collective in a state of distraction" (1183-84). If architecture can be used as analogy for the human body, and if analogy represents a powerful dynamic of interrelations, and if the body, to bring back Butler's statement, is synecdochal for social systems, then there is potentially nothing so powerfully taken for granted as the work of raising, razing, and mining the social body.

In the late Eighteenth Century, Julien Offray de la Mettrie famously wrote that the human body is a machine that winds its own springs (37). Descartes would build on this by understanding "that self-regulation is within the capacity of a machine" (Des Chene 24). Although Dennis Des Chene criticizes the lack of rigor with which Descartes worked out the details of his insight, he nevertheless credits him with constructing "a mechanism that, operating in a fixed pattern, eventually creates the conditions under which the pattern can begin anew" (25). It would be a considerable stretch to say that La Mettrie and Descartes anticipated autopoietic theory.

Nevertheless, some of the elements are there. These elements are not necessarily the origin or even the foundation of autopoiesis, but active participants in the open system that defies constraints of time or space; one layer nestled amongst many.

Every origin myth is an interpretive device for what we call culture. But Villiers reinterprets the established cultural apparatus of his environment in order to build his own system, establishing a structure that is coherent if not convincingly unified. Building on the myth amounts to excavating and then constructing a body of

great complexity over several layers of meaning, particularly when digging up has essentially the same meaning as digging deep. The pit may very well be deep, but the excavation is, in effect, profound.

I think we begin to see what we are pitted against.

### **Technologies of Construction/Hardwiring**

With the excavatory work well under way, it becomes relevant to look more closely at the minutiae of the mechanisms deployed (rather than employed) by Villiers throughout L'Ève future, since these are in the novel's immediate environment. If, as Dennis Des Chene suggests, in physiology "machines correspond to organisms, and mechanisms to organs," (72) then an autopsy of the sort Edison performs on Hadaly needs to be executed on the body of Villiers's work.

The mechanical automaton was born at the end of the eighteenth century, at the intersection of post-cartesian materialism and the theory that man was a machine, developments in clockwork technique, and romantic occultism (Noiray, Laboratoire de l'idéal 109). This scientific, technological and philosophical triumvirat is evident in early-nineteenth-century musings on the creation of artificial life, such as Shelley's Frankenstein or, a more direct ancestor of Villiers's work, E.T.A. Hoffmann's "The Sandman."

By the time Villiers was cogitating L'Ève future, more subtle technological developments were underway, and they were advancing at an accelerated pace. While the first half of the nineteenth century arrived with the great clatter of railroads and

steam, the latter half progressed more stealthily with the dynamo and electricity. As Miller-Frank points out, these developments clustered around the idea of “achieving spectacular ends through inconspicuous means” (160-161). Responsible for patenting such inventions as the phonograph, the incandescent light bulb, and the talking doll, amongst others, Edison, who became commonly known as the “Wizard of Menlo Park,” was a provocative figure for Villiers to use as the axis of his fantastical story, constructed initially as a satirical tale deploring the posturing of modern science.<sup>39</sup> While Villiers’s friend, the poet and inventor Charles Cros, had already developed an apparatus similar to that of the phonograph, which he called the “paléophone,” he was unable to patent it before Edison released his phonograph.<sup>40</sup> Presented to the French public in 1877, the phonograph was met with astonishment, incredulity, and fascination, adding to what Villiers would describe in his preface to *L’Ève future* – put forward as “Avis au lecteur” – as the “legend” that was awakened in the public imagination around the figure of Edison. Villiers adds that it is “le PERSONNAGE de cette légende” (37), and not the real man, who is the protagonist of his story. It is fitting that it is the simulacrum of Edison, the copy for which there is no justifiable original, the original for which there is no real need of an origin (only an inspiration),

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<sup>39</sup> For more information on the genesis of Edison’s inventions, particularly the phonograph and the talking dolls, as well as his possible reception of Villiers’s work, see Gaby Wood’s *Living Dolls*, particularly the chapter entitled “Edison’s Eve.” Wood also draws on a passage from Edison’s diary to suggest that Edison “privately thought of women as perfectible creatures,” thus crediting Villiers with an unconscious insight (138-139).

<sup>40</sup> While there is contention as to whether Cros or Edison developed the phonograph first, it is interesting and amusing to note that the official website of the Eiffel Tower casually asserts, in a section entitled “L’univers technologique de la fin du XIXe siècle,” which lists late-nineteenth-century technological developments, that in 1877 the phonograph was invented by Charles Cros in France, then by Thomas Edison in the United-States.

that is sitting on the first page of the final draft of Villiers's novel, "au centre d'un réseau de fils électriques" (Villiers, L'Ève future 39).

That Villiers should be stimulated by the technological achievements of the American inventor to create an ideally technologized woman requires perhaps a lesser connecting of the dots when one considers, as Miller-Frank astutely points out, that many of the adjectives that came to be associated with Edison's inventions after the phonograph, such as "sensitive, delicate, fragile, beautiful, curious", are adjectives "traditionally associated with women" (160-161). Conversely, just as a machine could be described using qualifiers generally reserved to express human attributes, so could biological functions be portrayed using terminology and imagery associated with machinery. Carol de Dobar Rifelj discusses the evolution of notions of the body from humors in the middle ages to the contemporary idea of soft and hard wiring, commenting that these developments are unsurprising since "each age takes its own technology as the model for its conception of the human "machine"" (127).

To better illustrate this point, it is useful to consider Lewis Mumford's division of the nineteenth century into two distinct parts, which he alternatively refers to as "systems," "complexes," or "regimes": the "paleotechnic" and the "neotechnic." From a technological standpoint, the paleotechnic revolves around the factory and the steam engine; the neotechnic is associated with electricity, light metals and precious elements, and the growing importance of the biological and social sciences (as opposed to the dominant presence of the physical sciences and mechanical arts). A paleotechnic example of Rifelj's assertion can be taken from an 1850 issue of "Household Words,"

in which Charles Dickens and Percival Leigh published a popularization, entitled “The Laboratory in the Chest,” of a lecture given by the British natural philosopher Michael Faraday. In the article, the human body is likened to a “wonderful factory” in which “the lungs are concerned in cooling us as well as heating us, like a sort of regulatory furnace” (589).

By the time Villiers was sketching out his future Eve, Charles Cros was constructing a battery “intended to demonstrate the absolute identity between electrical current and the phenomena of the human nervous system” (Miller-Frank 148). Thomas Edison built on the sociological potential of such positivistic conjecturing by applying it in a sort of metaphorical *a priori* to the social body as a whole. In his 1885 essay provocatively titled “Electricity Man’s Slave,”<sup>41</sup> Edison talks about the wonders of electricity, stating that “hardly a single nerve or fiber of that complex body we call society has not thrilled and vibrated with its influence” (8). One year later, L’Ève future was published as a novel, in its definitive version. Book V, which describes all the inner and outer workings of the android is, as Cipriani writes, “worthy of a mechanical treatise copied on physiology” (137). He adds that this technical discourse has the effect of making the reader accept the elements that make up the machine “as

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<sup>41</sup> In pointing out the etymology of the word “robot” in his essay on L’Ève future, from the latin meaning “forced labour,” Hubert Desmarets suggests that where there is the insinuation of something being forced, rebellion is also intrinsically implied (20). It is interesting to speculate as to whether Edison considered this when heading his article.



elements of the human body” (137).<sup>42</sup> For Julie Wosk, the “insistence on Hadaly’s verisimilitude in part reflects the nineteenth century’s fascination with producing imitations, reproductions, and facsimile images” (77). Villiers’s inventory of the methods utilized to create the android does, indeed, represent a fairly wide-ranging exposé of the reproductive technologies of the day, including photography, photosculpture (a process invented in 1861, the aim of which was to reproduce a living model in three dimensions through the use of photography), the phonograph, and the mimeograph (another of Edison’s inventions, patented as “Autographic Printing” in 1876).<sup>43</sup>

Villiers’s text is an example of what Mumford qualifies as neotechnic in the extreme: the android’s lungs are made of gold, her controls consist of precious gems, her balance is corrected by the constant undulations of mercury, themselves regulated by “de très fins systèmes dynamo-magnétiques” (240), “Électricité” with a capital “E” crackles throughout the text, most notably in Hadaly’s underground lair, where a multitude of artificial birds laugh and chatter with uncanny human voices, indefinitely

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<sup>42</sup> “Le livre V (...),” writes Cipriani, “est, dans l’ensemble, digne d’un traité de mécanique qui serait calqué sur la physiologie. Le discours technique tend à faire accepter les éléments contenus dans la machine (l’électricité, le magnétisme, les pierres précieuses, les métaux) comme s’ils étaient des éléments du corps humain” (137)

<sup>43</sup> Depending on who is reading *L’Ève future*, the list of technologies expounded by Villiers in his novel and the importance of each varies slightly. Noiray, for instance, focuses on the phonograph, photosculpture, and photography, including Charles Cros’s three-color synthesis photochromic process (*Laboratoire de l’idéal* 130, 137). Cipriani stresses the importance of chemical synthesis (135-136). Rifelj writes that Villiers takes as his “[superior automaton’s] machinery the phonograph, the telephone, the mimeograph, the photograph, the incandescent lamp, and new developments in electricity” (129). Asti Hustvedt adds that the image Edison projects of Evelyn Habal, complete with color and sound, “anticipates the Lumière brothers by more than a decade” (“Pathology of Eve” 34). Lathers focuses largely on photography, writing that it saturates the text, and “may appear at any moment as a reminder that a major signifier of the text is the technical object (92). Regardless of which technological angle is explored, on this last point there is clear consensus.

sustained by powerful generators. Echoing Cros's speculations, Villiers has Edison exclaim that "la réalité de notre fluide nerveux n'est pas moins évidente que celle du fluide électrique" (332).

The make-up of Hadaly's skin is also worth considering. Fernando Cipriani makes an interesting distinction between the idea of synthetic as it relates to the artificial, and synthetic understood as providing unity or synthesis (136). Villiers, familiar with the treatises of Marcelin Berthelot on chemical synthesis, describes the skin of the android using similar principles: Edison verbally decomposes Alicia Clary's skin into its principal constitutive elements, and then rebuilds it quite literally using the same chemical principles to create the artificial dermis. Edison is quick to point out to Lord Ewald that understanding the chemical composition of Alicia's skin in no way helps him process the reasons for which he loves her. Consequently, the verbal reconstruction of Hadaly's skin is a superfluous exercise. Suffice to say that the "hydraulic press" which homogeneously coagulates the various elements that make up the human dermis "a littéralement transfiguré leur *individualité* en une synthèse qui ne s'analyse pas, mais qui se ressent" (Villiers, L'Ève future 246).

Similarly, Edison states that "le mécanisme électrique de Hadaly n'est pas plus *elle* que l'ossature de votre amie n'est *sa personne*" (147). It is from this passage that Jacques Noiray extracts what he considers to be the synthesis of L'Ève future. "L'important," he writes, "c'est le "fantôme," c'est "l'unité transfigurante" à laquelle aboutit l'assemblage des éléments. (...) Dans le mouvement de ce processus idéalisant réside l'essentiel de la signification que Villiers a voulu donner à L'Ève future" (Le

laboratoire de l'idéal 117). The significance of the text lies in its capacity to build the technical object up into such high meta-technical abstraction that, ghostlike, it disappears from sight. This meta-technical construction is “un être d'outre-monde” (Villiers, L'Ève future 341) accessible only through the “fluide nouveau, mixte, synthèse de l'électricité et du nerveux” (Villiers, L'Ève future 339) that courses through the invisible networks that link the various actors in Villiers text. But the sort of interpretive path that Noiray excavates quietly suggests, to me in any case, that access to the transfiguring ideal requires surrendering to an out of body experience and observing ourselves from a respectful distance, eyes closed and divorced of all materiality. Certainly this is how Sowana fuses with Hadaly, shifting the meaning of the *synthetic* object in the process, navigating from artificiality to the coherence that comes with abandoning a defining and confining structure. Describing Sowana's somnabulic state, Edison informs Lord Ewald that her eyes are always closed and yet “elle y voit clair” (Villiers 330). The “grandes magnétisées” must necessarily see themselves as “distantes de leur organisme, de tout leur système sensoriel” (Villiers 333) in order to also distance themselves from their physical personality or their social body.

But what if the bone structure were, in fact, very much the person? “Faites jouer les articulations d'un squelette, elles vous sembleront brusques et *automatiques*,” says Edison (Villiers, L'Ève future 233). Nevertheless, it is the skeleton that allows the structure to exist in any meaningful, recognizable and inhabitable way. What if pure materiality is the backbone, the foundation of identity, its permanent residence? Can

high abstraction not have a material basis, even if hypothetically so microscopic as to be invisible to the naked eye (and therefore not fussed about whether the windows of the soul are open or wedged shut)? Rollet describes Villiers's *Andréide* as “la femme réduite à son corps, une structure vide qui n’attend que d’être animée par une force extérieure pour prendre un sens” (Rollet 91). Noiray calls her mechanical structure an “habitable parfait” (144). It is worth considering, however, how raw space can mold physical and psychological response. Does not space already have meaning before it is inhabited? How likely would we be to set up a dining room in a space that measures six square feet? If we were talking about bespoke space division, what would the floor plans of a ‘perfect habitat’ look like? And would we later dress it up in Terence Conran? The exterior, animating force that fills the void is no more or less tangible than the empty structure. Emptiness is only a question of materiality that is invisible to the naked eye.

As a replica of a human structure, Villiers's *Andréide* is already fraught with embellishments, adornments, exterior signs, and multiple crowded compartments. If we return to the notion of Hadaly as representing the body of the polis, the multiplicity cannot be limited to a single unifying structure but rather multiple unifying structures, the skeleton of a city, the shadow of a complex environment. Writing about Mesmer's theory of magnetism, Bordeau points out that it “posits subtle “fluids” that circulate within and between beings, and also function as an invisible environment” (195). Within the perfect habitat Hadaly, Sowana, Any Anderson, Edison and Lord Ewald all vie for space, rewiring themselves according to the complicated electrical networks

that animate the subtle, shifting and invisible (to the naked eye) environment around them, promising access to some sort of meaningful identity. The only character who does not actively participate in this transfiguring process is Alicia Clary, which seems logical since Alicia is the mythic origin amidst the madness, made irrelevant, or redundant, following the performance of the operation of excavation.

### **The Compulsion to Build (up, down and across)**

“In a novel about making a woman,” writes Hustvedt, “fragments of the female body appear scattered throughout the text. Figurative and literal dissections of a woman’s anatomy dominate the text.” (Science Fictions diss. 184). The material relics that are scattered throughout L’Ève future have the same sort of conjuring power as the phonograph does in its projection of voices in defiance of distance and mortality. Edison’s exhuming of Evelyn Habal’s decaying artificial parts is as technological a display of identity construction and perversion as is the film<sup>44</sup> that slowly strips away the artifice and exposes her in her “natural” grotesque incarnation. In fact, the macabre parade of Evelyn Habal’s props and makeup that Edison pulls out of a drawer – which contains such a lot of *stuff* it suggests a magician’s box with a false bottom – is a sort of rewinding of the little film of the charming, dancing, torted-up Evelyn. Technology makes it possible for her to be repetitively taken apart and rebuilt to the gleeful delight or the equally gleeful abject horror of her audience. Before their mesmerized gaze, she

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<sup>44</sup> Villiers describes this process, an anticipation of cinema and celluloid film as a series of successive photographs registered on a ribbon of microscopic glass plates which can contain ten minutes of movement, reflected by a powerful “lampascope.” Raitt informs us that the “lampascope” in question was in fact a magic lantern. See Villiers, L’Ève future 199, 421.

may come back to life and travel up or down (the direction is all the same) the spiral of decay into complete degeneration, or rejuvenation as the case may be.

“Lorsque nous avons pénétré l’essence des corps pondérables par la voie<sup>45</sup> des décompositions successives,” wrote Berthelot, “nous sommes conduits à recomposer ce que nous avons séparé, à refaire les corps que nous venons de détruire” (xi). The vacillating movement of raising and raising – bodies, buildings – thus seems ‘naturally,’ or at least chemically compelling. Before undertaking the ‘autopsy’ on Hadaly’s body, Edison warns Lord Ewald that “les arcanes du fantoche ne vous révéleront pas comment il deviendra le fantôme” (146).<sup>46</sup> The text, however, seems on some level to contradict these scattered statements of the ‘mechanisms’ being incapable of providing explanations for the sentiments that they nevertheless trigger (and that are quite literally triggered by mechanisms) and well as for the spirit that moves them, despite the fact that Villiers was contemptuously critical of the sort of thinking that sought to reduce human emotion to purely physical operation.<sup>47</sup>

In her essay on expressions of affect in L’Ève future and the 2004 anime film which drew inspiration directly from the novel, The Ghost in the Shell: Innocence, Sharalyn Orbaugh draws provocatively on Teresa Brennan’s notion of the transmission

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<sup>45</sup> Many critics, notably Felicia Miller-Frank and Gwenhaël Ponnau, have discussed the voice as the pivotal axis of Villiers text. MarieLathers puts forward an interesting argument that Hadaly is a walking silver plate, whose body is orally developed by Edison as he displays and describes the mechanical systems of her make-up (90). In the translation of Marcellin Berthelot’s statement to the environment of L’Ève future, it is interesting to consider supplanting the word “voie” with “voix.”

<sup>46</sup> In an interesting Wagnerian take on L’Ève future, Muriel Louâpre discusses not only the materiality of sound but boils the sublimation of the “fantoche” into the “fantôme” down to a musical principle: the andréide is animated by the sound engraved in its body, which acts as “leitmotiv-citation”, forming a sort of second level language of infinite possible combinations, and therefore of “*suggestions*” (80).

<sup>47</sup> See Orbaugh and Raitt’s preface to Jeering Dreamers, ed. John Anzalone.

of affect, which both expands on genetic determinist and modernist views of selfhood. If a modernist view sees the individual as a self-contained unit communicating with the outside environment through the neurophysiology of tissues without violating physical boundaries, and a genetic determinist view sees the body as “genetically programmed to respond in particular ways to environmental stimuli,” Brennan argues that the body is neither impermeable nor autonomous (Orbaugh 163). Affect can in effect be transmitted over a single or a series of operations between the system and the environment, with tangible results. The question for Lord Ewald is whether there is a “ghost” that can receive or transmit in Hadaly’s shell.<sup>48</sup>

In response to the improbable suggestion that he replace Alicia with Hadaly, Ewald conscience coldly retorts “Comment aimer zéro?” (223). But, Hadaly is not – as I have suggested earlier – an empty space. Hadaly is “multiple” (Villiers, *L’Éve future* 157). There are so many women in her that the harems of the world cannot contain her (Villiers, *L’Éve future* 317). Qualified as a “*présence-mixte*,” (Villiers, *L’Éve future* 121), she is also, as Rodolphe Gasché points out, a philosophical anomaly, “suspended between Nothingness and Being” (309). However, Gasché stresses that the “Nothingness” must not be mistaken for emptiness. “On the contrary,” he writes, “it is infinitely rich in possibilities” (311).

These possibilities are programmed into the orderly space of Hadaly’s operating system. Hadaly’s interaction with her environment – and its interaction with her – is

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<sup>48</sup> *The Ghost in the Shell* draws on British philosopher Gilbert Ryle’s term the “ghost in the machine,” used to describe and criticize the idea of the Cartesian soul floating around in the body.

determined by how imaginatively her operator can interpret her instruction manual and manipulate her body. The sequence in which the rings which control her actions and reactions are pressed, the way in which her prerecorded conversation is interpreted is, in effect, a direct projection – which can be played forward or backward – of the operator’s interpretation of his own set of instructions. “Attribue-moi l’être,” says the *Andréide* to Lord Ewald earnestly, “affirme-toi que je suis! Renforce-moi de toi-même. Et soudain, je serai tout animée, à tes yeux, du degré de réalité dont m’aura pénétré ton Bon-Vouloir créateur” (316). The act of creation is one of reinforcing a structure, of setting up the scaffolding to either build from the ground up or restore system functionality, even though – or perhaps especially since – it is not clear whose system is being restored, whose hardware is being restructured.

It is not only the interaction between human and *andréide*, however, that is animated by creative good will. Edison’s statement that Ewald’s love for Alicia is nothing but his “âme dédoublée en elle” (129)<sup>49</sup> convincingly echoes – if an echo can precede the “original” sound it reflects – the genetic determinist notion that what we feel “as emotion directed toward us from others is no more than an illusion that arises from our own genetically programmed desire to experience such emotion” (Orbaugh 164). As always in Villiers, no idea is impermeable, and so the notion that the soul with which Hadaly’s body will be infused is strictly a human attribute to be contributed by Ewald or the medium Sowana, dissolves when Edison challenges Ewald to allege

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<sup>49</sup> Raymond Bellour refers to this doubling of the soul as the “Narcissistic double.” He writes that “it is born from the subject’s concern for his own image, and for the conditions necessary for its formation” (115). As such, Hadaly becomes an “echo chamber” which allows for the release of Ewald’s image of himself, formerly obscured by Alicia (Bellour 115).



that a soul might not be confounded with the vapor that rises from a battery (266).

Whether the program is genetic, or whether it is a simulation thereof, the functionality is similar and shared.

Patricia Pulham, drawing on Baudrillard, qualifies Hadaly as the “perfect simulacrum,” existing in excess of the original to the point of having no relation to any reality whatsoever (18). In this context, Hadaly operates less on the level of the phantasmatic and more on that of pure signifier. Alternatively, if construed as a sort of revenant – the ghost both within and without the machine – Hadaly blurs the distinction between the animate and the inanimate, inducing, as Elizabeth Bronfen writes, “an intellectual hesitation whether she is a sign for life’s triumph over death or death’s inhabitation of life” (Over Her Dead Body 329). It is difficult to quantify presence and absence, nothingness and its counterpart, however, in a text where reality seems to be a subjective but paradoxically tangible abstraction. Baudrillard writes that “without an image or without a shadow, the body becomes a transparent nothing, *it is itself nothing but a remainder*” (Simulacra and Simulation 148). Hadaly functions doubly as “shadow,” as she is perpetually qualified in Villiers’s text, and as technical object.<sup>50</sup> As a shadow, however, she is expected to faithfully project the contours of her operator, not of her own body. In this sense, she is a body without a shadow, a remainder, ruins to be excavated. Hadaly may be dissected, displayed, examined,

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<sup>50</sup> Bordeau informs us that “Hadaly’s identity as a “shadow” reflects her intermediary position between the material and spiritual modes of existence. The image of the shadow evokes an obscuring of distinction, a blurring of boundaries” (197).

taken apart and rebuilt or reconstituted, verbally or literally. Even her conversation may undergo an auscultation.

If the process of taking apart and rebuilding is, in fact, one of excavating the essence, then whether we get to the bottom of something or whether we get to the top is simply a matter of perspective. The successive decompositions of female bodies in L'Ève future is about the work of reconstructing them into edifices of far greater complexity. The building of bodies, and by extension of selfhood, relies less on the ontogenetic process and more on the architectural, where the architectural borrows resourcefully from an imaginative panoply of tools and materials. Gasché writes that Hadaly is “the minimal structural support of repetition, idealization, identity, etc., without which no creation whatsoever could be envisaged” (311). While it is the minimal structure – the bare bones – that give the entire unit shape, it is also interesting to consider the idea of creation on a different scale. Berthelot writes: “si dans les combinaisons dérivées d’un élément polyatomique, un autre élément de même caractère vient à intervenir, il donnera naissance à un système plus compliqué. (...) Des édifices moléculaires d’une complication indéfinie peuvent ainsi prendre naissance” (158-159). And so in the birth of an edifice, erected through operations and interactions invisible to the naked eye, do we return to an origin myth of different proportions.

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### *Afterthoughts*

That Hadaly “drowns” at sea in the sinking of the ship *The Wonderful* is rather interesting in a cybernetic context.<sup>51</sup> When Norbert Wiener coined the term “cybernetic,” he drew his inspiration from the greek work for “steersman.” With the integration of technology into our systems comes the obligation to navigate the new limits of the body, to define them or to abolish them, to redraw or dissolve them. Perhaps to develop a new set of blueprints, but in every case to become the architects of our selves. The question, I imagine, is how to avoid drowning in the attempt.

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<sup>51</sup> Chantal Collion Diérickx also reminds us that the circumstances surrounding the sinking of the ship *The Wonderful* evoke the flood in Chapter VI of the Book of Genesis (108).

**Commercial Break**

A new construction system has been developed in Montreal, Quebec and it is called Bone Structure™. Houses are developed with a lightweight steel structure which is extremely flexible in terms of its design and assembly. The result is an open structure - the interior environment can be adapted to the exterior with ease, the exterior can be fully exploited by the active participants in this system. The website for Bone Structure™ lists four advantages to this system, the first two being that it is of "surgical precision" and that it is as easy to assemble as a Meccano Kit ("Discover the System's Advantages"). Most interestingly, the company's slogan is *Perfection is in our bones*, more beautifully enunciated in French as *Si la perfection vous habite*.

If perfection inhabits you, then it seems that this system is for you. Inhabited, infected at the core by the desire for perfection, for the clean lines of intelligible pattern, for the silence of lofty abstraction. Driven toward an Ideal. Driven mad. In the interstices of the vast lies the frenetic activity of the small. There are no static lines; only the white noise of crowded space. Navigation is untidy. There is a need to cluster, organize, discard, eradicate.

If perfection inhabits you learn, as the title of one of Terence Conran (founder of Habitat)'s books instructs, How To Live In Small Spaces.

If perfection has infected the core, the core must be taken apart and examined in its most intimate details. This is one way to navigate the smallest spaces.

**Chapter Three:**  
**Infinite Space, Depleted Resources: Building Beyond Limits in Alfred Jarry's**  
**Le Surmâle**

*It's so far out, it's in.*  
My Dad Said That Once

If the preceding chapter was primarily concerned with such vertical acts as razing, raising and excavating, this chapter adds a more *infinitely* horizontal dimension to the design. The vertical, however, is unquestionably preserved (*préservé...préservatif*) in what Michel de Certeau rightly refers to as the “solitary erection/constructions” of the “theoretical fictions of the impossible other” (157) (although truth be told, I am uncertain whether the other really is such an impossibility). Nevertheless, some acts are more easily conceived horizontally, and so the system begins to flesh itself out.

Before engaging with Alfred Jarry's Le Surmâle, it is important to familiarize ourselves with some elements of its immediate – and in some instances fairly remote – environment. Lewis Mumford's division of the nineteenth century into paleotechnic and neotechnic systems has already been discussed. Resisting, or more accurately exceeding such distinctions, the texture of Jarry's work, however, requires some additional foraging, occasionally into broader circles, or other spheres of the Venn diagram.

### **Cogs and Springs: The Man-Machine as Timepiece**

The analogies used to define the human body underwent a sort of Lamarckian adaptation over the course of the nineteenth century, sucking their characteristics from the neighbouring technological environment and passing them off to the next

generation of technological development, until their usefulness became obsolete or at least obscured. Not that this sort of evolutionary analogizing is exclusive to the nineteenth century – every age, whether the age is a collection of moments or something with a more homogeneous lifespan, builds its bodies with its own unique tools and adapts its environmental interactions.<sup>52</sup> The analogical progression specific to the nineteenth century advanced in fits and starts, displaying occasional signs of regression, occasionally furious growth spurts, and of course the underlying taint of degeneration. Furthermore, these metaphors were not contained within such nebulous lines as those of national borders. Just as “the tainted whiffs from across the Channel”<sup>53</sup> could affect the staunch British literary and artistic *milieu*, according to one somewhat acrimonious nineteenth-century critic, so did the exchange of the proliferation of scientific material and innovation cross not only the Channel, but the Atlantic, in what could be interpreted not necessarily as a pandemic, but rather as the beginnings of networking in the sense in which we have come to utilize it now. Of course, networks can go viral.

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<sup>52</sup> In his essay “Identity, autobiography, and the microgenesis of the self,” Bruce Duncan MacQueen lists the dominant, or “root” metaphors from the Middle Ages on as such: “society and the cosmos were an organism; in the Enlightenment, the organism had become a mechanism, often a watch; by the nineteenth century, a vast machine or engine; in the early twentieth century, a factory. In our own times, we have come to think of the universe as a network, the Internet writ large” (203). While I agree with the basic premise of these statements, I believe that analogizing specific to the body complicates the metaphorical landscape considerably.

<sup>53</sup> Margaret Armour’s metaphor of disease and contagion in her critique of Aubrey Beardsley and the Decadents deserves to be expanded here, as symptomatic of the biomedical discourse that gained speed as the century progressed. She asks “why not hoist the Decadents altogether off our shoulders and saddle them on to France? She has a nice broad back for such things, and Mr. Beardsley won’t be the last straw by many. Let us hug ourselves on our iron constitution, and the clean bill of health we should have, but for the tainted whiffs from across the Channel that lodge the Gallic germs in our lungs” (11-12).



During the Enlightenment, the writings of La Mettrie and Descartes contributed to producing an understanding of the body as a self-regulating collection of cogs, pistons and springs. While the image of the body as a sophisticated piece of clockwork waned as new technologies were developed, examples of literature concerned with creating parallels between humans and timepieces weren't extinct. Jules Verne's 1854 *roman de jeunesse* Maître Zacharius, published when he was 26 years old, tells the Faustian story of an old clockmaker's attempt to form a pact with the Devil, at the expense of his daughter Gérande, in order to live eternally and claim what he sees as his rightful place, acquired through genius and power, as God's equal. "Maître Zacharius a créé le temps," exclaims the clockmaker, losing his grip on sanity as the story progresses, "si Dieu a créé l'éternité!" (119). In the end, the clockmaker does not access eternity, but rather dies with the last of his creations – as mad scientists are inevitably wont to do – and the daughter is spared. Verne's cautionary tale – replete with elements that echo Hoffmann and Shelley – is built on the co-dependance between device, material and creator. "C'est bien une partie de mon âme," reveals Zacharius, "que j'ai enfermée dans chacune de ces boîtes de fer, d'argent ou d'or! Chaque fois que s'arrête une de ces horloges maudites, je sens mon coeur qui cesse de battre, car je les ai réglées sur ses pulsations!" (100) Alluding to the reciprocity of the relationship, he criticizes his assistant Aubert for not understanding the true nature of the materials used to build the clocks, beyond that they are various metals: "tu ne sens pas ces métaux, que mon génie anime, palpiter comme une chair vivante!" (103)

Zacharius's equating of life with ingenious mechanism (108), and consequently his equation of himself with God, ultimately point to the danger of the strictly scientific, of technological hubris, of the inappropriate mathematical equation. Gérande's failure to save her father from damnation is, as Jacques Noiray points out, directly related to her inability to perform the "miracle of humanizing abstraction" ("L'original anglais" 56). When Aubert relates the strange malfunction *en masse* of her father's clocks, Gérande simply replies "ce fait me semble naturel. Tout est borné sur terre, et l'infini ne peut sortir de la main des hommes" (97). Gérande's containing of everything earthly between *bornes*, or bounds, carries the mathematical connotations of an orderly system in which the elements are known, finite, and possess a familiar structure. It is her father's desire to exceed these boundaries, to ascend to a higher level of abstraction that negates the undeniable finitude of the human, that not only undermines his survival but eventually destroys him completely.

While the strategies used by Verne in Maître Zacharius diverge considerably with those of Alfred Jarry, what they do have in common is a preoccupation with scale – of time, of the infinite – and more importantly of how these specifications relate or translate to human timescales.

### **Calculating Engines: The Man-Machine as Dynamo**

As the nineteenth century progressed (regressed, digressed), different versions of the animal machine began to take shape around discourse that intimately associated new developments in engineering, economics, biology, and physiology. Texts such as

Charles Babbage's 1832 Economy of Machines and Manufactures and Andrew Ure's 1835 Philosophy of Manufactures mapped out a factory system in which human workers were positioned on the one hand as organs subordinate to the self-regulating force of the machine, and on the other as a skilled collective.<sup>54</sup> The uneasy relationship between automatism and skill parallels a distinction which Babbage makes between machines that "produce power" and those that "execute work," therefore creating the further "unequal division" of the productive "engine" versus the subordinate "mechanism" (16). Babbage goes on to discuss this first class of machines, the engines, in terms borrowed from biological discourse as "being very limited in the variety of its species," adding that "some species," however, "consist of numerous individuals" (16). In his essay on Victorian automata, M. Norton Wise points out how readily such distinctions adapt to creating gendered labour categories: "while women's work was associated with mechanism, with the repetitive motion of shafts, pulleys, belts, spinning machines, and looms moving forever in a cycle, men were the metaphorical engines driving and controlling systems of production" (170). According to Wise, Babbage organized the division of calculating labour along similar principles. Credited with inventing the forerunners of what we now call computers<sup>55</sup>— the calculating engines known as the Difference Engine and later the more complex

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<sup>54</sup> Schaffer "Babbage's Intelligence: Calculating Engines and the Factory System" (223). Interesting and useful in the present context, Katherine Inglis posits what she refers to as Ure's automaton-factory as a "superhuman figure" (7).

<sup>55</sup> In the nineteenth century, computers were the human workers who knew "only the rudiments of arithmetic, who actually carried out the enormous numbers of additions and subtractions required to construct the tables" designed by "five or six eminent mathematicians" used as a basis for the calculating "engines" (Wise 174).

Analytical Engine<sup>56</sup>— Babbage had intended to demonstrate “the mechanical basis of all intelligence,” which would consequently help level the playing field and eventually contribute to “raising the status and intelligence of all workers in the long run” (Wise 175). Wise believes that this approach backfired and rather served to reinforce gendered hierarchies of mechanism and engine.<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless, if the hierarchical structure of the factory system is distinct, it is also distinctly nebulous. Can a hierarchy ever truly be established in a system where the body coexists in a strange sort of symbiosis with the machine? It is this very interaction that curtails the lifespan of any categorical divisions, even while it establishes them. Furthermore, the very adaptability of the factory metaphor, from providing a model for the structure of society, whether viewed in a positive light or with a significantly more negative Marxist penchant, to supplying the framework for the body-machine complex,<sup>58</sup> to bridging the gap between socio-economic and anatomical systems, whether gender-specific or not, means that analogizing cannot easily trickle down a neat pyramidal

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<sup>56</sup> For a description of the Difference and Analytical Engines, including excerpts from Ada Lovelace’s translation of Federico Luigi Minabrea’s sketch of Babbage’s Analytical Engine, see Anthony Hyman’s Science and Reform: Selected Works of Charles Babbage.

<sup>57</sup> For Coleman and Fraser, Babbage encouraged the gender hierarchy of “low (feminine) as opposed to high (masculine),” which they consider ironic given Ada Lovelace’s role in developing the “first software programme for the Difference Engine” (9).

<sup>58</sup> I am here borrowing Mark Seltzer’s term. Seltzer develops an economics of consumption in which he argues that boundaries may be eroded through the miscegenation of body and machine, which destabilizes the nature/culture binary, generating what he calls “the naturalist machine”. He argues that bodies are constituted in a strictly regulated socio-political system, and that “bodies and persons”, products of a culture of consumption “are things that can be made.” See Bodies and Machines 103, 152, 157.

structure.<sup>59</sup> There are difficulties associated with gaining the appropriate perspective in order to map out a cohesive structure.

In his article “Babbage’s Intelligence: Calculating Engines and the Factory System,” Simon Schaffer discusses Darwin’s use of Babbage’s calculating engines as an analogue for the origin of species, developing what was effectively “the natural equivalent of the systematic gaze” (225-226). According to Babbage, “the world could be represented as an automatic array only visible as a system from the point of view of its manager. The world system was a macroscopic version of a factory” (Schaffer 226). The coupling of a natural macro structure with the cultural micro substructures insinuates in the process ideas of emergence and interaction as we understand them today within the interplay of networks. Structural complexity thus emerges from the intelligence of a system’s organization; organism and environment interact in an intricate series of embodied exchanges and operations.<sup>60</sup> Schaffer’s formulation also opens up, quite literally, an alternate perspective that is not unlike Barthes’s discussion of the bird’s eye view of Paris experienced from the top of the Eiffel Tower. This perspective, new to the nineteenth century, permitted onlookers, according to Barthes, to “transcend sensation and to see things *in their structure*,” creating a new category in the process, that of “concrete abstraction” (“The Eiffel Tower” 9). Being able to interpret structure, to ground abstraction, thus conveys a sense of power. If “systems

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<sup>59</sup> For additional information on the reactions of various nineteenth-century thinkers, such as Carlyle and Ruskin to the machine and its relationship to the body and society, see Sussman’s Victorians and the Machine, especially chapters 1 and 3. For a more detailed discussion of the body as a factory in need of efficient management, see Armstrong 81.

<sup>60</sup> For a further definition and discussion of interaction and emergence, see Riskin 6-29; Hayles 225-237.

are socially constructed” as are “the productive and unproductive bodies which inhabit them” (Schaffer 205), then it stands to reason that the power to build complex bodies, whether individual or collective, lies with whoever or whatever carries the blueprint, can interpret the design, and knows how to manipulate the materials, or conversely with the ability to translate the concrete into a network of abstract patterns and then apply them in self-regulating panoptic fashion.

If Darwin was fuelled by Babbage’s system, applying some of its principles to On the Origin of Species and, to more disturbing effect, The Descent of Man, ideas of emergence and interaction also helped structure the thoughts of other nineteenth-century thinkers, particularly with regard to the physiology and functioning of the human body.<sup>61</sup> In her introduction to Genesis Redux, Jessica Riskin writes that “Huxley’s idea that mind was a collateral product of bodily structure grew out of his commitment to Darwinian gradualism” (7). Thomas Huxley’s 1874 essay “On the Hypothesis That Animals Are Automata” dissects Descartes’s argument that the living body is a mechanism using examples of case studies and indeed displays a Darwinian strategy evident in such formulations as “the living body is not only sustained and reproduced: it adjusts itself to external and internal changes” (194). The translation of this evolutive self-regulation to the “ego or subject,” which Huxley associates with the

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<sup>61</sup> In her essay “Darwin and Reductionisms: Victorian, Neo-Darwinian and Postgenomic Biologies,” Angelique Richardson sets up the dichotomy that existed between Darwinian notions of organism and environment interaction against the Neo-Darwinistic discourse that emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century, which attempted to ‘reduce evolutionary development and culture to biological and deterministic principles’ (5). In arguing that the “the more complex aspects of Darwinian thought which emphasize interdependence are paralleled in postgenomic thinking,” (5) Richardson situates ideas of interaction within the Darwinian landscape and effectively sets up a dialogue between Victorian and contemporary biological theory. The sort of two-way traffic established by Richardson informs the development of my own discussion in this chapter.

“mental world,” is illustrated in a diagrammatic scheme meant to “help elucidate the theory of sensation.” “Immediate knowledge,” he explains, “is confined to states of consciousness, or, in other words, to the phenomena of mind. Knowledge of the physical world, or of one’s own body and of objects external to it, is a system of beliefs or judgements based on the sensations” (88). The “self” is thus a system developed through the symbiotic relationship between organism and its physical environment. M. Norton Wise suggests that Huxley’s argument owes more to William Benjamin Carpenter’s Elements of Physiology (1839), intended as a textbook for medical students, than it does to Cartesian philosophy, or as Huxley terms it, physiology. In an interesting passage, Carpenter discusses the fundamental idea of “life” as being directly linked to the organization of matter, in architectural terms:

It has been maintained by those who consider Vitality as something superadded to an Organized Structure, essentially independent of it, and capable of being subtracted from it, that Death frequently takes place under circumstances, which leave the organism as it was; so that "the dead body may have all the organization it ever had whilst alive." For such an assumption, there is not the least foundation. (55)

“Organized Structure” is a term that comes up again and again in Carpenter’s textbook. The “self” is thus also a pattern of information deeply embedded, or more accurately, embodied, in the organism which depends for its survival on its coherent organization, thus allowing the structure to be kept intact and functional.

A parallel development across the Channel – set on a similar course but not quite intersecting – took the form of physiologist Étienne-Jules Marey’s 1873 essay La machine animale: locomotion terrestre et aérienne. Marey set out to dissect the body at

work, prodigiously inventing a series of *appareils* – or apparatus – in the process, in order to record such things as heartbeat, gait, the flapping of wings, pulse rate, muscle contractions, thermodynamic principles, etc.<sup>62</sup> Marey’s strategy to support the theory of the animal machine was thus one of empirical data gathering, meant to provide unquestionable evidence of its veracity. As Anson Rabinbach points out in The Human Motor: Energy, Fatigue, and the Origins of Modernity, for Marey, the “‘animal machine’ was not simply an analogy, as it was for the “ancient authors” like Descartes.” It was an “organized system, or motor” (90). The body’s production of heat and the burning of calories is compared quite literally to a steam engine’s carbon combustion.<sup>63</sup> This analogy is similar to that expounded by Michael Faraday and vulgarized by Percival Leigh in “The Laboratory in the Chest,” discussed in the previous chapter. What Marey most significantly contributed to the discourse surrounding organism as mechanism is, according to Rabinbach, “a new language to describe the body at work, a language of time and motion” (87). “The single theme that can be distilled from all of Marey’s writing,” argues Rabinbach, “is that the body is a theatre of motion” (97).

The idea of the body as theatre of motion takes on interesting connotations and a certain literal significance when one considers it in the context of Alfred Jarry’s body of work. Jarry is best known for Ubu Roi, precursor to the Theatre of the Absurd, a Rabelaisian play that borrowed and trampled elements from Macbeth, and gave its

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<sup>62</sup> For a detailed list of the apparatus in La machine animale, see Marey 295-296.

<sup>63</sup> Marey 8,15; Rabinbach 90.



audience the sort of shock that wouldn't fall short of a turn in the electric chair when it opened with the adapted expletive "Merdre!" Having presented Ubu Roi at the puppet theatre, le *Théâtre des pantins*, Jarry refused to distinguish his live actors from his puppets, referring to them in the same terms and speaking regrettably of his curtailed plans to suspend the live actors from strings, while hiding their features behind masks.<sup>64</sup> In Jarry's version of the theatre of motion, human bodies become parodic expressions of living organisms, entities ironically stripped by their added appendages of human credibility and left suspended between the performance of vital organizing structures and the mimesis of an interaction with an obscured environment, simulacra in a system from which they are by degrees removed. Such a system does not evolve along a linear course, but seems set upon a vortex of ambivalent exchange, moving swiftly and chaotically with self-deregulating intent.

### **Extending the Man-Machine**

In setting out to close the gap between inanimate machines and those that were living,<sup>65</sup> Étienne-Jules Marey nevertheless noted one important distinction between the two, which was that the animal motor cannot work incessantly (71). Jarry's *Le Surmâle* would set out to obliterate this last boundary in record-breaking fashion,

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<sup>64</sup> Jules Bedner "Éléments guignolesques dans le théâtre d'Alfred Jarry" (69). For more information on Jarry's use of marionettes and his portrayal of man-as-marionette, see Jill Fell's *Alfred Jarry: An Imagination in Revolt*, especially chapter 5, "The Making of Ubu: Jarry as "Literary Puppeteer.""

<sup>65</sup> Marey vii.

drawing on the ever-increasing general fixation with overcoming the limits of the human body to fully realize the potential of the human machine.

The negative image of the “organized system of machines” put forward in Capital by Marx, the “mechanical monster whose body fills whole factories” (416) and transforms the workman into a “living appendage of the machine” (530), a “mere fragment of his own body” (396), had a flip side that was of smaller and more seemingly positive scale, if hardly more innocuous. As Tim Armstrong notes, “many technological developments were modelled on the body – particularly the deficient body” (81). The body could be augmented, improved, and the analogous relationship between man and machine made more explicit. One striking example is the German philosopher Ernst Kapp’s 1877 treatise on the philosophy of technology, in which he develops the theory that tools, or technical artefacts, are in fact extensions of human organs, from the most primitive to the most technologically sophisticated. Kapp does not stop there, but develops a sort of network theory of his own by stating that the network of arteries that unifies the railroads into a closed system which ensures the circulation of humanity within its parameters is a copy of the network of blood vessels of the human organism (149). The affinity between electrical currents and the human nervous system, as seen in the previous chapter, is likewise obvious for Kapp.<sup>66</sup> The ever-increasing momentum of technological improvement, specifically as it relates to

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<sup>66</sup> See Kapp, chapter 7.

the body, would eventually lead Freud to declare, in Civilization and Its Discontents, that man has “become a kind of prosthetic God” (28).<sup>67</sup>

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It is said by some that our blood is composed of infinite living agents which go up and down the highways and byways of our bodies as people in the streets of a city. When we look down from a high place upon crowded thoroughfares, is it possible not to think of corpuscles of blood travelling through veins and nourishing the heart of the town? No mention shall be made of sewers, nor of the hidden nerves which serve to communicate sensations from one part of the town's body to another; nor of the yawning jaws of the railway stations, whereby the circulation is carried directly into the heart,—which receive the venous lines, and disgorge the arterial, with an eternal pulse of people. And the sleep of the town, how life-like! with its change in the circulation. (Butler, Erewhon 209-210)

What is a man's eye but a machine for the little creature that sits behind in his brain to look through? (Butler, Erewhon 208)

One could be forgiven for assuming that these passages are translations of excerpts from Kapp's philosophy of technology, rather than selections from Samuel Butler's novel Erewhon, published in 1872. The passages in question are part of three chapters in which the narrator translates the “The Book of the Machines,” the work which brings about a civil war in Erewhon between two parties called “the machinists” and the “anti-machinists,” eventually leading to the destruction and abolishment of all machines by the Erewhonians. Adopting a theory of scientific materialism “that denies any qualitative difference between the biological mechanisms of living systems and the

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<sup>67</sup> Beyond the scope of this chapter, it is nevertheless interesting and pertinent that Friedrich Kittler develops a fascinating argument for language as prosthesis, linking discursive production with the available technologies of each age. “Technologically possible manipulations,” he writes “determine what in fact can become a discourse” (232).

cognitive and cultural activities of human beings” (Zemka 242), Butler’s Erewhon represents a sort of early formulation – a formulation, say, in an earlier stage of development – of what Jean-François Lyotard suggested in The Inhuman when he wrote that “what makes thought and the body inseparable isn’t just that the latter is the indispensable hardware for the former, a material prerequisite of its existence. It’s that each of them is analogous to the other in its relationship with its respective (sensible, symbolic) environment: the relationship being analogical in both cases” (16). From the dependancy on a micro level of body and intellect can eventually be derived the larger scale of the social and, perhaps, most interestingly, vice versa. The body is in a sense thus constructed on a grander scale, only to be perceived, by the “little creature who sits behind the brain,” less as a concrete abstraction but rather as a somewhat abstracted concrete structure,<sup>68</sup> with which the individual may interact on the more intimate scale of 1 to 1.

The intimate relationship between the body-machine and its organs – extensions, appendages, apparatus – must also be emphasized. In tracing the evolution of his literary output, Butler discusses the train of thought that led him to theorizing

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<sup>68</sup> It is tempting to here replace “concrete structure” with the word “concretion,” thus implying both something that is made concrete, and a foreign mass existing in an organic structure. Upon reflection, it is regrettably further from my meaning here, although not completely inappropriate, which is why it finds its way into the notes.

“not only machines as limbs, but also limbs as machines” (Unconscious Memory 25).<sup>69</sup>

The integrity of the body must therefore be understood as a further fraction, as unity with hairline fractures. As such it represents an even smaller scale, an adjunct subsystem, a prosthetic appendage of sorts in which the elements of the bigger picture are mapped out, forcing the mutual adaptation of living systems and their mechanisms to expansion or reduction as the case may be. For me, this is where “the fundamental oscillation between humanity as both infinity and limit” (Zemka 242) occurs in Butler’s work, and where it can most usefully be utilized in a conversation with Alfred Jarry’s Le Surmâle.

### **Evolving Towards a Sate of Exhaustion**

As the fusion between body and machine began to take a more concrete form, so did concerns regarding the ability of the one to keep up with the other, or more accurately, for the body-machine to keep up with itself. The analogous relationship that developed in the latter half of the nineteenth century between the human organism, particularly its network of nerves, and electrical currents has been discussed in the previous chapter. What should be added here, without reverting to reductive dualisms, is that there is always a dark to a light side, or at the very least the light always casts a

shadow, thus the very “‘spark’ of life” also became “part of a network of power which transcended the scale of the human body and could kill” (Armstrong 14). The body, at the very centre of this network, became the site on which material progression built up to frenetic proportions. The dynamics of power could therefore be understood in literal terms, as the interplay between the body as dynamo and networked electrical system, and the environment which fed into and from it, pulsing like a monstrous sea anemone. In this exchange of energies modelled on thermodynamic principles, the ability of the body to operate successfully within its rapidly changing environment was called into question.

“Judging from the extraordinary proliferation of studies of fatigue in the 1880s and 1890s,” writes Anson Rabinbach, “we can conclude that fatigue was consuming the energies of society” (146). If the question of nervous exhaustion became central to European communities in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, the term to describe this phenomenon was coined by the American physician George Miller Beard in the 1860s. *Neurasthenia*, as he termed it, was a thoroughly modern disease which could be linked to the fact that “cultural evolution had outstripped the pace of individual evolution” (Gosling 11), and more specifically to such developments as “steam power, the periodical press, the telegraph, the sciences, and the mental activity of women” (Beard vi).<sup>70</sup> Interestingly, Beard saw nervousness as a particularly American disease, more specific to the Northern and Eastern States, though he

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<sup>70</sup> For a discussion of Thomas Edison’s role in the development of neurasthenia, according to Beard, see Armstrong 18. For Beard’s sources and influences, see Charles Rosenberg’s chapter on “George M. Beard and American Nervousness” in No Other Gods: On Science and American Social Thought 101-108.

conceded that it was becoming more frequent in Europe (viii). Symptomatic of progress and technological evolution, there was, it seemed, some pride to be taken in a society afflicted by its nerves,<sup>71</sup> so much so that a good portion of a review of American Nervousness in the British Journal of Science is spent arguing over who is more nervous - England or America.

The image of neurasthenia as the disease of mental superiority was short-lived as Henry Maudsley in England, and more significantly Fernand Levillain, a student of Jean-Michel Charcot in France, claimed, dissected, and reclassified the disease into pathological territory closely associated with hysteria.<sup>72</sup> In his notorious bestseller Degeneration, Max Nordau would associate hysteria and neurasthenia with the “veritable epidemic of mental diseases” that afflicted Parisians, culminating in the “craziest fashions in art and literature” which were symptomatic of this “morbid exhaustion” designated the *fin-de-siècle* (43).

The idea that “exhaustion was the constant nemesis of the idea of progress” (Rabinbach 19) was closely associated with notions of degeneration and entropy, and while the machine stood for advancement and productivity, it also came to signify, as William Leiss words it in his essay “Technology: The Sublime Machine”, the “ultimate degeneration” which is the “death of humanity” (151). H.G. Wells’s Time

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<sup>71</sup> For a discussion of neurasthenia as a nationalistic disease of the male elite, see Elaine Showalter’s essay on “Hysteria, Feminism, and Gender” 294-295.

<sup>72</sup> In his article “Sex in Mind in Education,” (1874) Henry Maudsley directly connects the education of women, which inhibits their natural reproductive functions, to the development of neurasthenic symptoms. Fernand Levillain’s La neurasthénie: maladie de Beard (1891) is a comprehensive study of the origins of neurasthenia, its symptoms, causes, manifestations, diagnosis, prevention and treatment. For a discussion of neurasthenia as a symptom of sexual pathology, particularly of excessive masturbation, see Havelock Ellis’s Studies in the Psychology of Sex, Volume 1.

Machine is a striking example of the application of thermodynamic and evolutionary principles to speculation about the future of the human race. The human race, it seems, is one waged against time and the constant danger of retrogression. When Wells has his narrator, philosophizing upon the laws of nature, reflect that “an animal perfectly in harmony with its environment is a perfect mechanism” (141), the statement distinctly echoes E. Ray Lankester’s assertion that “in Elaboration there is a new *expression* of form corresponding to new perfection of work in the animal machine” (32).

Degeneration, the “*suppression* of form, corresponding to the cessation of work,” and elaboration were thus considered two sides of one very volatile coin, two possible outcomes of the ebb and flow between organism and environment. The perfection of the animal’s mechanism is related to the degree to which it can adapt or not to variations in environmental complexity, a notion that would lead Herbert Spencer to coin the term “survival of the fittest” in his Principles of Biology. The Eloi of Wells’s Time Machine, caught in the entropic drift of inaction and therefore unable to ensure their own survival, have “decayed to a mere beautiful futility” (119), and become fodder for the “nauseatingly inhuman” (117) Morlocks. Comparable to Butler’s Erewhonians, their relationship with the machine-like Morlocks is explicitly one of slave to master, and the fate of the Eloi is the concretization of the Erewhonians’ fearful speculation that “the ruling spirit of man” will be overrun by “machine the servant”, that “the servant glides by imperceptible approaches into the master” (100).

As the time traveler flings himself forward from the year Eight Hundred and Two Thousand Seven Hundred and One, A.D. to an uncharted space, Wells’s ultimate



dystopian vision of futurity takes form. Not only is the evolutionary process thrown dramatically into reverse in proportion to the distance the time traveler advances across centuries, but the ultimate vision of the future is one of nauseatingly hopeless entropy, where every living organism of even recognizable animality is extinct, replaced by a primeval world of deliquescent abominations, who shift their putrid, viscous forms under a sky from which all light has been abolished.<sup>73</sup>

### **Hyper-Complex Systems: Wilkie Collins's The Law and the Lady**

The body, as we have seen in Marey, exists in a space where the two-way traffic of time and motion converge. The modern body is in constant, frenetic conversation with its urban environment. Nicholas Daly develops a theory about the city that weaves modernization more intrinsically into the fabric of literary production. Drawing on Walter Benjamin's argument that "the hyperstimulation of the nerves" is a "component of modernization" that not only infiltrates everyday life, but "makes itself available as artistic technique or subject matter" (Daly 38), Daly suggests that late Victorian literature, particularly the sensation novel, helps to retrain the Victorians to "accommodate the shocks of mechanical modernity" by "naturalizing the modern nervous subject" (33). The strategy employed is one of "temporal training: through its deployment of suspense and nervousness the sensation novel synchronizes its readers with industrial modernity" (37). In this scenario, the sensation novel is both a literary

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<sup>73</sup> Wells's vision of the distant future carries some of the flavour of Anatole Baju's definition, in his literary journal of the 1880s *Le Décadent*, of the late nineteenth-century in terms of a "deliquescent" modernity, with, as Hustvedt notes "its connotations of liquification and dissolution" (Hustvedt 13).

device adapted for survival, and an apparatus that can be used prosthetically by the reader to augment his/her/its chances of successfully navigating modernity.

Daly cites Wilkie Collins as an author whose texts embody this literary strategy, and furthermore whose literary strategy engenders an embodiment wherein the “body is experienced as the interface between the new technology and nature, as both a potential machine itself, and as a resistance to the modernizing effects of the machine” (42). Whether the body can successfully resist the magnetic pull of the machine is a subject open for debate, and for Daly, “the most vivid example of this dystopian vision of the modernized body – at once mechanical and nervous” (51) comes to life in the form of the wheelchair-bound cripple Miserrimus Dexter in Wilkie Collins’s 1875 novel The Law and the Lady. Dexter appears as “a human locomotive in an infernal setting” (Daly 51): “I heard the rumbling and whistling sounds approaching me,” narrates Collins’s heroine Valeria. “A high chair on wheels moved by, through the field of red light, carrying a shadowy figure with floating hair, and arms furiously raised and lowered working the machinery that propelled the chair at its utmost rate of speed” (210).<sup>74</sup> The frightful, frenetic figure of Dexter is “man and machinery blended in one – the new Centaur, half man, half chair” (Collins 210-212). Collins here delivers a modern mythology, in which the fragmented body “animated by

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<sup>74</sup> Another interesting image of man’s ill-fated collision with the locomotive occurs, differently, in Charles Dickens’s Dombey and Son. As Carker is confronted with Dombey after his betrayal, his morbid fear of being crushed by a locomotive is realized as he inadvertently stumbles onto the railway tracks: he “saw the red eyes, bleared and dim, in the daylight, close upon him - was beaten down, caught up, and whirled away upon a jagged mill, that spun him round and round, and struck him limb from limb, and licked his stream of life up with its fiery heat, and cast his mutilated fragments in the air” (823). Dickens’s anthropomorphization of the locomotive is here used as an ironic device which points to Carker’s own affinity with a machine that crushes everything that has the misfortune to be in its path. The result is a particularly gruesome and violent vision.

an almost superhuman energy” (Daly 51) is a simultaneously horrific and fascinating specimen of a form of mechanical evolution gone horribly wrong.<sup>75</sup> The Darwinian undertones in Collins’s text are made more explicit as Dexter springs out of his chair upon being introduced to Valeria, and lands on the floor “as lightly as a monkey,” “hopping away, on his hands, at a prodigious speed” (212). In these juxtaposed passages, Dexter embodies both the image of prosthetic progression, and that of evolutionary regression, conflated in one nauseatingly abhuman hybrid.

The chaotic compound that Dexter represents intimately connects his body with the idea of emerging complexity. In contemplating Dexter, Valeria remarks that his “many sides were developing themselves at such a rapid rate of progress, that they were already beyond my counting” (306). Such an observation could also be applied to describe the multiplicity of Villiers’s Hadaly. Even more interesting in this context is considering Niklas Luhmann’s statement that “a psyche that becomes too complex runs the risk of turning ‘pathological’ in the sense that it will become unable to make decisions, perform simple tasks, or function in society.” He adds that “what we call ‘madness’ is nothing more than the hyper-complexity of psychic systems that can no longer distinguish themselves from their environment” (xviii). Dexter’s latent madness, occasionally manifesting itself in violent flashes, is quite literally reflected in his immediate environment. Dexter’s derelict house is cluttered with such horrific

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<sup>75</sup> I will come back to Nietzsche in my discussion of Jarry, but it is interesting to here include a passage from Arthur Kroker’s The Will to Technology and the Culture of Nihilism, completely unrelated to Collins’s text and yet strangely relevant, in which Kroker describes Nietzsche as “the figure of a minotaur, half-man/half-god; half-flesh/half-machine - a thinker of degree zero, a site of intense contradictions where all the differences meet, and are all the more energized” (83). I will not elaborate, but will simply be grateful for this happy space where parts of the Venn diagram in my head coincide.

curiosities as paintings of “bloody corpses, disembowelled horses, dissected cats, and tortured, skinned, or roasting saints” (Talairach-Vielmas 166), photographs representing “the various forms of madness taken from the life,” casts of “the heads of famous murderers,” a “frightful little skeleton of a woman” hanging in a cupboard (Collins 253), and the “skin of a French Marquis, tanned in the Revolution of Ninety Three” (Collins 254), which Valeria initially mistakes for a shirt of chamois leather. Eventually Dexter’s “highly sensitive” nervous system (290) collapses in on itself, and the “monster’s madness” (330) settles permanently into the “mute vacant face” and “senseless, changeless grin” (359) that would not be out of place displayed in a cabinet, alongside the other morbid relics. The relationship between Dexter’s psyche and what is in effect his cybernetic organism is one of self-reflexivity that fails to distinguish between what is outside the system and what is in. There are no boundaries, and consequently it may be added that, where there is the abolishment of respective spaces, what is far out is also in.

Miserrimus Dexter has been identified as the double of Eustace Macallan in his externalization of Eustace’s effeminacy (Wagner 491). His androgyny has also been set against that of his companion Ariel, engendering (pardon the pun) a discussion of the inversion of gender roles and of a master/slave dialectic.<sup>76</sup> That Dexter inverts gender roles and literally pulls the strings of his puppet Ariel (Collins 338), much the

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<sup>76</sup> Talairach-Vielmas, comparing elements of Collins’s story with the tale of *Bluebeard*, is concerned primarily with the Gothic subtexts of his novel. Of Ariel’s relationship with Dexter, she writes that the “misnamed” Ariel “is a manly version of the submissive wife. (...) Ariel is her master’s slave (...) crouching on the rug and demanding to be punished and beaten or letting herself be her master’s puppet” (166).

same way as he manipulates the strings of his harp (granted with more deliberate cruelty if not less creativity), is only one interpretation of their relationship. The vocabulary which Collins uses to describe both Dexter and Ariel points to an affinity between the two that is more level than that of master to slave, but of equal intimacy. On a very basic level, both are repeatedly referred to as “creatures.” Dexter is the “frantic creature” (211), the “deformed creature” (309, 313), the “terrible creature” (211-212). Ariel is described in more submissive terms as the “vacant, inanimate creature” (217) and the “faithful creature” (372), although she does display the slight, dim spark of the “mischievous half-witted creature” (346). Ariel is mechanical in her movements and in her behaviour. Collins does seem to build a hierarchy: while Dexter is a complex man-machine, Ariel embodies the simpler mechanism of the primitive automaton. Nevertheless, complex or simple, both systems are co-dependent and ultimately it is this failure to distinguish themselves from each other, this collapsing of parameters, that undermines their respective capacities for self-creation and survival. The terrible outcome of Dexter’s conflation of progress and reversion has been alluded to. Ariel’s is foreshadowed in the “shapeless cheeks” (311), “shapeless shoulders” (310) and “shapeless hands” (344) of her “imperfectly-developed” “shapeless form” (214), which recall nothing so much as the deliquescent creatures of H.G. Wells’s dystopian vision of a future so extreme it is creeping stealthily into recognizable space.

### ***Hors Dimension and the Shape of Things To Come: Alfred Jarry's Le Surmâle***

It is 1902 and Alfred Jarry's parodic, heterodox, irreverent, disturbing novel Le Surmâle is published. It is difficult and perhaps a little irrelevant to consider plot when discussing Jarry's work, but we can identify essentially two elements: a ten thousand mile race over five days is organized pitting 5 cyclists against a locomotive, and a man (a *man*? we are not sure) named André Marcueil sets out to break a sexual record of performing intercourse seventy times in a single day, anticipating the gang bang. Clearly there is a preoccupation with records and breaking them. The nineteenth-century fixation with recording and classifying enables, according to Foucault, a bio-political control of the population (183). The body is considered a machine that can be scrutinized, analyzed, surveyed, kept track of, and integrated into different control systems (Foucault 183). The body's successful navigation of this bio-power is a difficult task, since it takes the form of an energy that flows through the various networks of power, an invisible materiality that can leave very physical traces. Navigation must therefore happen intuitively. The trajectory set out in Le Surmâle, however, is precisely one of exceeding the boundaries of any control system primarily by obliterating the limits of the human body. The text is set on a horizontal course that fabricates an image of the restrictive body as an irrelevance, at the very least a farce, by stretching it farther than the eye can see towards the infinite. Michel Pierssens writes that "l'homme, par l'intermédiaire de Marcueil, tente de s'y décrire comme théorisable et soumis au calcul, à l'instar de n'importe quel phénomène physique, et les forces qui l'animent (l'amour, la mort) comme réductibles (au sens scientifique et noble du terme)

à un savoir du rythme, de l'énergie et du temps" (43).<sup>77</sup> It would seem that the infinite must paradoxically – or perhaps quite logically – be accessed through scientific reduction, and then seduction of the body.

In his essay on "Men, Machines, and the Modernity of Knowledge in Alfred Jarry's Le Surmâle," Philip Hadlock notes that Jarry's novel "does not purport to present a realistic rendition of interactions between humans and machines at the turn of the century" but rather "deliberately exaggerates its representations of people, of things, and of their entry into the cultural systems that assign meaning to them" (132).<sup>78</sup> While this may be true, Jarry's text nevertheless converses with the specific antecedents that clutter its environment in a more confidential tone than Hadlock's assertion suggests.

Hadlock interestingly theorizes that "the *surmâle* might best be explained as that undocumented counterpart to hysteria in the modern development of sexual identity" (136). The "extraordinarily ordinary" appearance of André Marcueil thus comes to signify "male consciousness as simulacrum" (Hadlock 136), a manipulable object that calls into question "credulity pertaining to the construction and coherence of the male subject" (Hadlock 147). For Jill Fell, Marcueil's "nez ordinaire, bouche ordinaire, taille ordinaire" (Le Surmâle 15) is a mimetic strategy with entomological origins. Whether Marcueil's pathological ordinariness would be best contained within

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<sup>77</sup> As Armstrong points out, with the advent of antiseptic surgery and chloroform, "the body could be more safely penetrated after 1857" thus allowing it be to "resolved into a complex of different biomechanical systems, conceived in thermodynamic terms" (2).

<sup>78</sup> Maria Tortajada's reading of Le Surmâle posits Jarry's text as a mechanical monster born directly of the various technologies and scientific context specific to the late nineteenth century (211). In a sense, this view stands in opposition to Hadlock's.

the annals of the *Salpêtrière* or those of an entomological society, or, for that matter, within a chapter of Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis*, where Fell's and Hadlock's interpretations coincide is in attributing to the superman the powers of absorption, simulation and reflection that offer ultimate adaptability. "Le "mimétisme," announces André Marcueil, "est une loi de la conservation de la vie" (40). So much the better if the emerging organism is illegible or incoherent, a "philosophical monster" with human and mechanical traits that are indistinguishable.<sup>79</sup> Jarry's superman really is of a different species from the one of which spoke Zarathustra - the one that stands across the abyss from the animal, connected by man, stretched between them like a rope (Nietzsche 34).

In an essay for his periodical *L'Ymagier*, Jarry wrote: "Il est d'usage d'appeler MONSTRE l'accord inaccoutumé d'éléments dissonants: le Centaure, la Chimère se définissent ainsi pour qui ne comprend. J'appelle monstre toute originale inépuisable beauté" (*Oeuvres complètes* 972). This evolution of monstrosity, from the mad abjection represented in such a figure as that of Wilkie Collins's Miserrimus Dexter to the terrible beauty that sidles up to the infinite in its inexhaustibility, can be traced along the trajectory of *Le Surmâle* in a series of almost cinematic stills depicting man and woman's intimate coupling with the machine, with each other, or more broadly put, with a host of technological and organic apparatus. When Ellen Elson, daughter of an American chemist (clearly inspired by Edison) and Marcueil's future partner in the

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<sup>79</sup> Michel Pierssens describes this "monstre philosophique" as "un tel entrelacement de traits machiniques et de traits humains que les mystères de la science et les mystères de l'être s'y mêlent pour former un hybride révélateur des possibilités et des limites de l'un et de l'autre" (42).



sexual experiment, arrives at his home in her “monstrous automobile,” the whirring of the motor and the appearance of the vehicle lead him to describe it as a “siren” and a “hippogriffe” (67-68). The mythology of the machine is quickly superseded by Ellen, wearing a driver’s mask which gives her a birdlike appearance, reminding Marcueil that real sirens were in fact “de surnaturels oiseaux de mer” (68). As Ellen leaves, the automobile again takes on generous mythological proportions: “la machine exhibait sans pudeur, on eût dit avec orgueil, ses organes de propulsion. Elle avait l’air d’un dieu lubrique et fabuleux enlevant la jeune fille” (81). The vehicle here displays, in the vacillation between feminine and masculine gender, an androgynous sexuality that anticipates Ellen’s own transition from “un petit bout de femme” (67) to a formidable sex machine. As distinctions dissolve in the senseless, violent, relentless repetition of the sex act, humanity itself becomes a meaningless term. In the indefinite lies the insignificant, the incoherent (“l’amour est un acte sans importance, puisqu’on peut le faire indéfiniment” [*Le Surmâle* 11]). Only an end, or an entropic dissolution of the supernatural energy that animates the two enmeshed bodies, can re-establish the myth of humanity and its tenuous origins. As Marcueil explores Ellen’s inert body, believing her dead from her sexual exertions, he discovers, where there was “quelque femelle encore anthropoïde,” in her place is now “la première femme, épanouie par l’amour” (188). Jarry’s vision of Adam and Eve is a technological one. The serpent in the garden of Eden is in fact a phonograph (“le pavillon du phonographe eut l’air de la gueule luisante d’un serpent, menaçante” 181) that witnesses Marcueil and Ellen’s transgressions (“il eut l’air (...) d’un grand monocle pour cyclope méchant” 176),

providing a macabre and mesmerizing soundtrack in its strange, limpid, trembling voice. The beginning of the ages –“au temps où quelque chose de Surhumain créa la femme” (183) – can only be accessed through the ultimate transgression, which is death. “Sa fémininité,” writes Michel Pierssens of Ellen, “[Marcueil] la découvre alors comme corps morcelé, machine démembrée, réduite à la juxtaposition inerte de ses composantes. Il faut qu’en elle la machine meure pour que la femme apparaisse” (44). If the technological apparatus must be shed as a snake sheds its skin in order for Woman to emerge, it is nevertheless the means to achieving the evolutionary ends of Jarry’s Darwinian-flavoured origin myth. Woman materializes on the other side of the abyss from her anthropoid double having traveled on a horizontal trajectory across the technologically superhuman, stretched before her. Like Villiers’s future Eve, Jarry’s *première femme* is multiple (“JE SUIS SEPT! Est-ce assez pour vous, mon Indien?” 150), timeless, infinite, absolute. But unlike Hadaly, Ellen survives. It is the survival of the fittest. “Il faut bien que l’homme, pour survivre, devienne plus fort que les machines” (*Le Surmâle* 205). Just as the “Machine-à-inspirer-l’amour,” meant to cure Marcueil through eleven thousand volts of electricity of his sexual and moral pathology, falls in love with the *Surmâle*, as he is the stronger of the two, so Marcueil falls in love with Ellen. “Je l’adore,” he utters, referring to Ellen, as he is strapped into the machine-à-inspirer-l’amour and crowned with a tangle of electrodes (202). Woman, divested of her technological apparatus and contained within “les sages limites des forces humaines” (*Le Surmâle* 209), is the most powerful entity of all, not least because of her ability to adapt to her environment. The *Surmâle*, on the other

hand, dies electrified in a tangle of iron bars, another victim of the precipice that stretches before the infinite.<sup>80</sup>

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When Marguerite Eymery, better known under her literary pseudonym Rachilde, first met Alfred Jarry, she was struck by the singular appearance of the short and stalky man dressed in cycling gear before her, who reminded her of nothing so much as a dangerous animal (Rachilde 29). She would later revise her impressions, stating that “tout était machinal chez lui et il n’avait pas d’autre prétention que de s’imposer à l’humanité en qualité de machine très bien réglée” (119), adding that when he was on his bicycle, of which he was inordinately fond, “il semblait faire corps avec sa machine” (127). Rachilde cleverly applies the body of Jarry’s work to that of the man. The *Surmâle*, it should be noted, has been referred to as Jarry’s avatar.<sup>81</sup> If the strategy of building the body of the man through that of his work and vice versa seems rather reductive, it nevertheless provides a glimpse of the environment in which Le Surmâle is constructed.

As has already been discussed, the latter half of the nineteenth century took hold of the body and firmly anchored it within evolving scientific discourse. Jean-Christophe Valtat notes that the trio of Elson-Gough-Bathybius, introduced in the opening chapter of Le Surmâle, could just as legitimately be referred to as chemistry-engineering-medicine (64). The preoccupation with observing, monitoring and

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<sup>80</sup> It has been suggested that Marcueil is the masculine homolog to Villiers’s Hadaly. See Pierssens 48 and Stillman 110.

<sup>81</sup> Stillman 110.

recording the body's functions and capacities and reducing them to a series of statistics or figures meant that those observing caught a glimpse of what they imagined to be the body's limit, and this limit, as Valtat points out, was simply labelled fatigue (66).<sup>82</sup> As nervous fatigue spread across late-nineteenth-century discourse, so did efforts to eradicate and exceed it. William Elson's speculation on the possibilities of indefinitely putting off the effects of human fatigue and his subsequent revelation of having developed an alcohol and strychnine-based concoction, christened the "Perpetual-Motion-Food," which can achieve just that (Le Surmâle 16-17) is no pure fabrication of Jarry's. Neither is the choice of a bicycle race as the testing ground for this magic elixir.

While the first bicycle races took place in the late 1860s, road racing reached its apogee in the 1890s, with many races exceeding 200 kilometres. The Paris-Brest-Paris of 1891 counted 1,200 kilometres, which Charles Terront would complete in 71 hours and 35 minutes over three days without rest, to the great satisfaction of 10,000 or so admirers (Thompson 12). As the frenzy for bicycle racing increased, cycling periodicals flourished, with the inaugural Tour de France, organized by the periodical L'auto (formerly L'auto-vélo, now L'Équipe), taking place in 1903. Roland Barthes compares the Tour de France to a homeric odyssey, to an exploration of terrestrial limits (Mythologies 106). In order to navigate the human and inhuman spaces of the

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<sup>82</sup> Dominic Pettman interestingly contends that "concurrent fears about technological invasions of the body produced a sense of exhaustion and depletion that had an abrasive effect on the soft underbelly of Progress" (114). This would suggest, in a Foucauldian twist, that the invasive scientific scrutiny to which the body was subjected served only to induce and produce the effects it was attempting to record, understand and suppress.

Tour, riders possess two resources: “la *forme*” and “le *jump*,” veritable electrical influx that jump starts their organisms and “leur fait alors accomplir des prouesses surhumaines” (*Mythologies* 106-107). As usually occurs when man looks over the precipice into the infinite, an “affreuse parodie” of the *jump* exists, which for Barthes is “aussi sacrilège que de vouloir imiter Dieu” (107). Jarry would exploit the parodic element of the practice of doping and push it to an extreme resolution.

Initially used in the hippodrome, doping quickly became commonplace in the cycling milieu, as greater and greater demands were made on the bodies of the riders. Ingredients used to combat fatigue included, amongst others, caffeine, strychnine, cocaine, and arsenic. Concoctions such as *la liqueur de Pearson* and *la liqueur de Fowler*, essentially potassium arsenate, were liberally ingested by riders who were unaware of the dangers incurred.<sup>83</sup> “De quoi réveiller un mort,” observes Jean-Pierre de Mondenard, “après l’avoir tué!” (9). In Jarry, this exclamation becomes quite literal as Jewey Jacobs, one of the motley crew of five riders enlisted to participate in the ten

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<sup>83</sup> For the recipe for Pearson’s and Fowler’s liqueurs, see Auguste Millet’s *De l’emploi thérapeutique des préparations arsénicales* xvi-xvii. Millet’s study also provides a comprehensive view of the mid-nineteenth-century uses of arsenic and its physiological effects. Ailments treated with arsenic include “les névralgies, les névroses, les maladies des voies respiratoires, les maladies du tube digestif, les maladies de l’utérus et des ovaires” and the list goes on (ix). It is worth noting that in Wilkie Collins’s *The Law and the Lady*, Eustace Macallan’s first wife uses arsenic, initially purchased to improve her complexion, to commit suicide. While the fatal effects of the arsenic are deliberately exploited in Collins’s novel, it seems that accidental death from arsenic consumption was not uncommon in young ladies wishing to improve their looks. In *The Chemistry of Common Life* (1855), Johnston cites the specific example of a “healthy but pale and thin milkmaid” who took arsenic several times a week in order to plump up her figure and beautify her complexion. “In a few months,” he reports, “she became stout, rosy-cheeked and all. (...) In order, however, to increase the effect, she incautiously increased the doses of arsenic, and fell victim to her vanity. She died poisoned, a very painful death” (401-402). In his article on arsenic poisoning, P.W.J. Bartrip points out that arsenic, commonly purchased for vermin control in the nineteenth century, became “the poison of choice for would-be suicides and murderers” at a time when “divorce was well nigh unattainable” (893). Collins’s text very much reflects factual accounts of arsenic usage, and in this he diverges considerably from Jarry. Where they do coincide, however, is in depicting the use of poisonous substances to redraw the boundaries of the body, tragically culminating in the erasure of death (and what is erasure if not the redrawing of a line invisible to the naked eye to infinity).

thousand mile race against the express train, fuelled exclusively by Elson's *Perpetual-Motion-Food*, dies during his exertions but somehow manages to keep pedalling.

"L'homme," (Jewey Jacobs, now dead), "récalcitrait, contre-pédalait, *grippait*. C'est extraordinaire comme ce terme, qui s'applique aux frottements des machines, convenait merveilleusement au cadavre. (...) Le *sprint* de Jacobs mort fut un sprint dont n'ont point d'idée les vivants" (*Le Surmâle* 96, 101). If the quintuplet "turns into a part of the machine, into a living accessory to a moving structure" (Mikkonen 190), Jacobs's fusion with the machine becomes even more intimate, as his capacity to continue to produce movement and energy is intrinsically linked to the perpetual motion of the bicycle. His relationship to the machine, or rather the machine's relationship to him, becomes almost necrophilic. The sclerosis of Jacobs's tissues also anticipates the improbable repetitive hardening of the *Surmâle*'s sexual organ, phenomenon to which Marcueil alludes, without being taken very seriously by Dr Bathybius, when he talks about the effects of alcohol as a superfood (52). The sexual collision between Ellen and Marcueil is also anticipated in the locomotive's mysteriously sprouting an upholstery of red roses: "On eut dit que des champignons sanglants, dans l'espace de cette nuit-là, avaient crû sur la vitre" (93). As Ellen, the only female "participant" in ten thousand mile race, lowers one of the train's windows, she tears the surreal curtain and the largest rose alights in her wagon. Michel Carrouges interprets this as the loss of virginity (95), but the birth of femininity seems to be disturbingly, fragrantly redolent of venereal disease, and eroticism takes on a strange pathology that comes of coupling with the machine. For Mikkonen, drawing

on Seltzer, this “coupling” signifies “the unresolvable fusion between man and machine” into a “body-machine or machine-body complex where both the identities of the machine and the human being are redrawn [opening] up a new space of inquiry vis-a-vis the human subject and the limits of humanity in general” (193).<sup>84</sup> This statement seems to carry some of the optimism of Haraway’s “Cyborg Manifesto,” but the treatment of man’s fusion with machine and the redrawing of the lines - (could we possibly use the word “identical” here as an adjective to qualify the lines of identity?) - in Jarry networks between eroticism and death with *infinitely* more ambiguous results (even though the body-machine complex is, as its name might be seen to suggest, an already complex system).

Body fuses with bicycle sustained by a substance that allows it to exceed the parameters of organism and enter into a version of a *paradis artificiel*. Or, body fuses with bicycle consumed by a substance that reeks of paradise lost. Or, the simultaneous embodiment of both these interpretations, stretching the body-machine, in paroxysms of pleasure alternated with pain, from one extreme to the other. To obliterate limits and rewrite the records, I believe one must be prepared to suffer, and relish it.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Mikkonen also formulates the body-machine complex as being where “the limits of selfhood and desire, the person’s inside and outside or the line between the animate and the inanimate are redrawn” (199).

<sup>85</sup> For Deleuze, Jarry’s oeuvre “places itself under the sign of the *Bicycle*. (...) And it is the Bicycle that transforms the Passion, as the Christian metaphysics of the death of God, into an eminently technical relay race” (93). The Passion of the Christ will later be taken up more overtly in Jarry’s text as Marcueil is strapped into the “Machine-à-inspirer-l’amour” and gives off the supernatural impression of being the “Roi des Juifs diadémé d’épines et cloué en croix” (202). This adds another dimension to the *Surmâle*, a dimension that I will discuss in more detail and which I believe is more closely associated with the birth of God, and therefore of man.

Marcueil's destruction of the dynamometer in the opening chapters of Le Surmâle is not his first transgression of the sort. We are informed that a little girl had been found raped to death on the grounds of his residence (124). The parallel between the two becomes more obvious as Marcueil contemplates the machine: "La fente du dynamomètre, verticale, luisait. - C'est une femelle, dit gravement Marcueil..." (66). As he slips a coin into its slit, he rips the machine out of the ground into his arms, spilling its "guts." Later, Marcueil will affirm that "ça ne s'appelle pas démolir un appareil, de constater qu'il n'est pas assez solide pour résister à l'usage auquel il est destiné" (123). In the analogous relationship between machine and organism, species survival is the direct outcome of the unsteady equation between fitness for the task, submission to control, and the seizing of power, all negotiated through a pathological eroticism where the dialectic is less one of master to slave as of victim to aggressor. The accession to *Surmâle* in Jarry's text seems a dark parody of the Nietzschean will to power. The question of survival stretches into a broader space than that of man's ability to survey and interpret the blueprints of a system in which one monstrous organism absorbs its human components, worming himself thus into a position of authority. Nor is it one in which equivalencies must be established in order for them to be demolished in their instability. In Le Surmâle, the engineer Arthur Gough develops the "Machine-à-inspirer l'amour" in the hopes of "curing" Marcueil by reasoning that "si cet homme devenait une mécanique, il fallait bien, par un retour nécessaire à l'équilibre du monde, qu'un autre mécanique fabriquat...de l'âme" (200). But the train of thought is faulty, and "personne n'est assez fou pour regarder dans les yeux, la nuit,



le fanal double d'une locomotive qui grandit en s'approchant, je suppose" (Le Surmâle 199). The collision between body and machine when corralled into a closed space has spectacular consequences in Jarry, creating a real theatre of chaotic motion.

Freneticism, depletion, progression, degenerative eroticism – all of these are bit parts affixed to a larger pulsing picture, one backlit with nervous energy. Against this backdrop, lies the heart of Le Surmâle – fantastic mechanism beating erratically – or its structure-dependant soul. But both of these apparatuses are perishable and bound to be exhausted by repetitive usage.

How can the space in which the body evolves and dissolves then be defined?

"THÉOREME: *Dieu est infiniment petit*" (Le Surmâle 145). As in Villiers, the foundation is carved out of an origin myth that needs excavation. Writes Jarry:

L'homme a créé Dieu à son image et à sa ressemblance, agrandies jusqu'à ce que l'esprit humain ne pût concevoir de dimensions. Ce qui ne veut pas dire que le Dieu conçu par l'homme soit sans dimensions. Il est plus grand que toute dimension, sans qu'il soit hors de toute dimension, ni immatériel, ni infini. Il n'est qu'indéfini (Le Surmâle 145).

The God of deliquescent modernity – undefined, indefinite, man-made – is no longer sufficient, however, according to Jarry. The God who Creates resides, infinitely small, in the living centre of man. "Car pour qu'il soit Dieu il faut que sa Création soit infiniment grande. S'il gardait une dimension quelconque, il limiterait sa Création, il ne serait plus Celui qui a créé Tout" (Le Surmâle 145). The site of construction therefore begins at the site of convergence, at the centre of the Venn diagram (and its coursing network of veins) and radiates out, out of all dimension. Limits are obsolete. What outline can the body assume under such conditions? At the core of the body are

building specifications compounded *ad infinitum*, invisible the naked eye. From one end to the other, the body is stretched into indefinable shape, farther than the eye, or the little creature who sits behind it, can see.

***Cul de lampe (or perhaps lampe de cul)***

“Dieu est hors de toute dimension, *en dedans*” (Le Surmâle 146).

This is one way of saying it’s so far out it’s in.

## **A Word From Our Sponsors**

A 2010 advertisement for soy-based dairy-replacement products, timed for the Vancouver Winter Olympics, features the formidable Clara Hugues, one of Canada's most decorated Olympians, squarely meeting the camera's lens with a toothy grin, skates in one arm and soy beverage proudly displayed in the other. A variation for the Summer Olympics positions her confidently mounting her bike. The advertisements informs us that "The Body is a Marvellous Machine," and we are firmly advised to "Nourish it" ("Ads").

We cannot help but observe the clean, strong lines of this marvellous machine, prosthesis neatly tucked under her arm, or between her powerful thighs. She smiles broadly out at her efficiency, her superhuman resilience, reflected back, confirmed, embedded in the admiring gazes of those who peer down the funnelled vision of sublimity and hope to recognize something of themselves in these displays of power. We are drawn irresistibly into this model, in which we regulate ourselves to conform to the beautiful lines of perfection only to distend them in unmanageable paroxysms of desire. We seize up in claustrophobic spaces, gaskets get blown, fantasies go viral in their attempt to replicate themselves in such close-quarters. Still, what wonderful promise holds the tightly-clenched, sinewy fiber of such a system. I, for one, watch the elites compulsively.

Let's nourish the Ideal.

**Chapter Four:**  
**Unsound: Fragile Structures of Body and Soul in Jules Verne's Le Château des**  
**Carpathes and George Du Maurier's Trilby**

A sentence is made of words, and words are made of letters, no less than a house is made of wood or a living creature is made of atoms of carbon, hydrogen, and so on. But as in the other cases, the primary thing about a house is not what it's made of. (...) What is primary is that a house is made of *rooms*. (...) Of course, it *matters* a great deal what a house is made of. (...) We could say that there is an interface of houseness and woodness and that some aspects of woodness (its susceptibility to termites and fire) are inimical to houseness (Livingston 80).

In George Du Maurier's 1894 runaway bestseller Trilby, the various facets of the eponymous heroine's mercurial personality each represent "a new incarnation of Trilbyness" (Du Maurier, Trilby 65).<sup>86</sup> Trilby expresses her *self* differently depending on whether she is speaking English or French. She transitions from a rather liberal-minded artist's model to a repentantly modest *blanchisseuse de fin*. Her most dramatic conversion is of course that which carries her along an unpredictable wave<sup>87</sup> from tone-deaf *grisette* to the notorious diva La Svengali to a "tuneless and insane" "siren" (Du Maurier, Trilby 261).<sup>88</sup> We are informed that it is "this last incarnation of Trilbyness," the physical "wreck" that is the vestige of Trilby's mesmeric misadventures with Svengali's musical genius, the siren ironically stripped of her voice, that is "quite the sweetest, most touching, most endearing of all" (261). Nina Auerbach reads Trilby's metamorphic power as one which allows "her character to transform itself endlessly and, in so doing, to renew endlessly the world around her" (286), reminding me of Ira Livingston's likening, discussed in my second chapter, of the body to "a phoenix

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<sup>86</sup> All references are to the 1998 Oxford University Press edition, unless otherwise specified.

<sup>87</sup> A wave perhaps akin to the wave-particle theory of light, with its microscopic levels of minutiae?

<sup>88</sup> We may here recall that in Alfred Jarry's Le Surmâle, Ellen Elson, as she drives up to André Marcueil's residence, is described as a siren - a sort of technological siren, part human, part animal, and part machine. We may perhaps add that there is nothing so tuneless and insane as the sound of an emergency vehicle siren, descendant of a nineteenth-century invention.

always rising from its ashes” (78).<sup>89</sup> Does Trilby’s regenerative power run so deep as to draw on the principles of cellular regeneration? It is perhaps most telling that “Trilbyness itself,” (Du Maurier, *Trilby* 202) is identified as Little Billee’s sketch of Trilby’s foot, an appendage of seeming stasis – whatever incarnation Trilby assumes, her foot remains the same monumental foot. And yet it is this covetable foot that is endlessly reproduced in casts and photographs, allowing all who are interested to possess a fragment of the woman, which as Auerbach points out, has a “self-contained and totemistic value” (284). Reproduction here takes on broader significance than that of simply producing endless copies, despite the Benjaminian connotations that such activity suggests. The fragmented reproduction of Trilby, the distribution of her essence, carries the material weight of the relic – albeit a paradoxical relic symbolically attached to a still-living organism – coveted by the fervent and the faithful. As such, her reproduction takes on a nurturing quality, to which her “virtual giantess” stature (Auerbach 284) contributes credibility, particularly on a visibly physical level. Mother of all creatures, great and small, short and tall, as a friend of mine used to say. In a sense, the difference between cellular regeneration and infinite reproduction is really a technological one. The medium and the mechanisms may vary – “they must only be capable of entering into the necessary relationships or performing the functions required” (Livingston 80) – but the basic purpose is *essentially* the same. The house is, indeed, in the first instance made up of rooms, and these rooms are lived in and not

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<sup>89</sup> While it can hardly be argued that if *Trilby* focuses on any one fantastic phenomenon, it is hypnosis, Trilby’s endless capacity for renewal anticipates in significant ways the theme of reincarnation, more overtly explored by Du Maurier in his last novel, appropriately published posthumously, *The Martian*.

lived in. Trilby, herself, situated (sub)liminally between renewed and renewing organism and fragmented object of worship is both lived in and not lived in. And occasionally, the lights are on but nobody's home.

What, then, is Trilbyness, really? How does Trilby – or even does Trilby – enter into the necessary relationships with a broader context of not humanity but a humanness that vacillates between the autonomous and the automatus (both of which imply self-operation)? Is the body of Du Maurier's text bound by immediate environment or does it participate in a greater network via an interface distinguished by its inimical features? These are some of the questions that will be assigned (sub)liminal status in this chapter, and that will inevitably hover into the nucleus of the thing, as peripheral objects often do.

In the opening pages of Paris au XXe siècle, Jules Verne puts forward an interesting reflection on the solidity of education: “Or, construire ou instruire, c'est tout un pour les hommes d'affaires, l'instruction n'étant, à vrai dire, qu'un genre de construction, un peu moins solide” (28). Pushing the analogy along, we may conclude that the body of knowledge, embedded within the institutional construct, or construction, is also unsound. On a more intimate level, individual texts participate as the bricks and mortar, and may contribute to the construction's unsteadiness, or simply fall victim to the wear and tear inflicted by the passage of time. In a sense, Trilby may be read as a historical ruin, a novel dropped from the canon of popular classics<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> For possible explanations as to why Du Maurier's text faded into obscurity for over a century, see Elaine Showalter's introduction to Trilby (viii-ix).



despite its raging success upon publication,<sup>91</sup> with the renewal of serious textual excavation only taken up near the close of the twentieth century. What is most interesting in the context of *Trilby* and other nineteenth-century texts that explore facets or technologies of sound, including Jules Verne's *Le Château des Carpathes* (1892), is the idea of an *unsound* construction. At stake in this instability is a vacillation – akin to the swinging pendulum of a grandfather clock? – between presence and absence, in which a version of the (wo)man-machine that is both articulate(d) and voiceless emerges, not silent so much as *unsound*.

### **Voicefulness: Structuring Inside and Out**

In his essay “The Lamp of Memory,” John Ruskin claims that “the greatest glory of a building” is in “that deep sense of voicefulness, of stern watching, of mysterious sympathy, nay, even of approval or condemnation, which we feel in walls that have long been washed by the passing waves of humanity” (166). The building is not only an eloquent witness to the past, but an active, vocal participant in human timelines and human affairs. In the passing of its judgment, it “half constitutes the identity, as it concentrates the sympathy, of nations” (Ruskin 166). Ruskin’s depiction of the building as a stern and commanding presence of monumental proportions, heavily weighted with the inheritance of its human flotsam, is reminiscent of nothing

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<sup>91</sup> For more information on how *Trilby* became a “powerful collective fantasy,” (249) see Emily Jenkins’s article “*Trilby*: Fads, Photographers, and “Over-Perfect Feet.””

so much as of Gothic literary convention.<sup>92</sup> This particularly architectural facet of the Gothic works itself into late-nineteenth-century texts, which significantly also incorporate elements related to the voice, more specifically to the technologically-produced and reproduced voice. The castle of Jules Verne's Le Château des Carpathes, for instance, is a fearful, colossal, phantasmagoric ruin, whose "plan géométral offrait un système aussi compliqué que ceux des labyrinthes de Porsenna, de Lemnos ou de Crète" (334-335), and which is seemingly haunted by the allegedly dead opera diva La Stilla.<sup>93</sup> Similarly, the old house called Thorpe Place in which Arthur Conan Doyle's 1899 short story "The Japanned Box" is set is imbued with Ruskinian history and the stench of the passing centuries. "It was a very, very old house," we are told, "incredibly old – pre-Norman some of it – and the Bollamores claimed to have lived in that situation since long before the Conquest. It struck a chill to my heart when first I came there, those enormously thick grey walls, the rude crumbling stones, the smell as from a sick animal which exhaled from the rotting plaster of the aged building" ("The Japanned Box"). John Picker suggests, in his discussion of Verne and Conan Doyle, that the "rotting castle reflects the moral and emotional state of its owner" (131).<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Chris Baldick's defines the Gothic as "a fearful sense of inheritance in time [combined] with a claustrophobic sense of enclosure in space, these two dimensions reinforcing one another to produce an impression of sickening descent into disintegration" (xix). Although not, perhaps, what Ruskin was attempting to articulate, his formulation of the building nevertheless suggests these two key elements.

<sup>93</sup> John Picker, who describes Le Château des Carpathes as a gothic parody (131), translates La Stilla as "the silent one," (131) (as does Felicia Miller-Frank, 166) which is pertinent in the context of this paper, but it is worth noting that "stilla" in Italian means a drop, or a bead, as in "a drop of sweat," or "stilla di sangue," as in a drop of blood. "Stillare lacrime" means to shed tears.

<sup>94</sup> Picker also notes that Conan Doyle's "Japanned Box" derives its major elements from Verne's text, adding that Le Château des Carpathes was translated into English the year following its publication (131).

Indeed the baron Rodolphe de Gortz, in his crumbling *château* at the foot of the carpathian mountains, is reminiscent of another Transylvanian resident, and bears not a passing resemblance to the egregious Svengali, literally scaring La Stilla to death with his insistent, phantasmagoric stare. Sir John Bollamore of Conan Doyle's story, described as a "formidable," "Mephistophelian" man, is as imposing and forbidding as his ancestral home,<sup>95</sup> and likewise gives off a tainted whiff of rotting, moral disintegration, the precipice of which he is continually drawn away from by the recorded dying words<sup>96</sup> of a "ministering angel" who "spent her life in making a man once more of that which had degraded itself to the level of the beasts" ("The Japanned Box").

These resemblances carry more significance if we consider Thomas Fuchs's linking of both dwelling and habit to the memory of the body. "Bodily experience," he writes, "is particularly connected to interiors which over time are filled with latent references to the past and with an atmosphere of familiarity" (3). The past becomes something literally inscribed on the body, transforming the body into an apparatus that "mediates the real, living presence of the past" (Fuchs 8). One doesn't have to stretch one's imagination overly much to conceive of the body in this context as functioning as

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<sup>95</sup> It is worth pointing out that in Villiers's *L'Ève future* and Jarry's *Le Surmâle*, the residences of Edison and Marcueil also function as a reflection of their owners. Edison's solitary Menlo Park, tucked amidst a network of electrical wires and concealing mysterious hidden depths, and Marcueil's *Lurance*, a centuries-old *château* inherited from his mother, which incongruously combines elements of distant past and latest technologies, both reflect their owners's ambiguous status as scientific hybrids, loaded with undisclosed constituents that draw vertically into the bowels of the earth in the case of Edison, and horizontally across time in the case of Marcueil.

<sup>96</sup> The preservation of the last words of the dying was one of the purposes predicted by Edison for his phonograph (Kittler, von Mücke and Similon, "Gramophone, Film, Typewriter" 111). Both Verne and Conan Doyle indeed exploit this possibility in their respective texts.

the cylinder of a phonograph, on which the voice of the past is made visible, legible, and reproducible. The body as material mediator of something that would otherwise be intangible also recalls the body of the hysteric, which would be converted into phonographic cylinder or notebook through dermatographism, a signature or a diagnosis literally etched into the skin in the sort of approval or condemnation evoked by Ruskin.<sup>97</sup> In the essay “Gramophone, Film, Typewriter,” Kittler, von Mücke and Similon point out that both the phonograph and cinematograph “refer, not accidentally, to writing” and that their storage capability was one that allowed them to “store time” (104). “Media,” we are told, “can reconstruct bodies beyond the systems of words, colors, or sound intervals,” beyond what is referred to as the “symbolic grid” (110). As such, there is a distinct correspondence between the way in which media and the body function, both mediating the spectres of the past and the formlessness of the future into a distinctly tangible real time construct. The body and the technological apparatus that reproduces it operate in a relationship of *va et vient*, on the level of equivalents, each participating in the *building*, functioning here as both noun and verb, of each other.

The intimacy experienced between the body as technological apparatus and the structure which it inhabits – and which is inhabited by it – means that memory becomes a construction site where we may begin to build our selves. In her article on the function of memory in George Du Maurier’s first novel Peter Ibbetson, Athena

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<sup>97</sup> Janet Beizer offers examples of the etchings that could be inscribed on the hysteric’s impressionable skin, “following the vagaries of the doctor’s will: the doctor’s signature, patient’s name, diagnosis, invocation of the devil, ornamental design, and so on” (20).

Vrettos discusses the way in which memories are transformed into “building materials” (7). The narrator, she argues, “outlines a theory of matter and memory, ultimately identifying the endurance (and mingling) of memories across time and space as the material basis of the universe and the only “eternity” that man can experience (7). The senses thus take on a central role “in both producing and retrieving memories, consistently emphasizing the powerful relationship between objects in the material world—a child’s wagon, a Parisian street, an abandoned pair of gloves—and the experience of happiness, consciousness, and sense of continuous identity in the subject’s acts of recall” (Vrettos 9).<sup>98</sup> The kind of nostalgia for the bohemian Paris of the 1850s exhibited by Du Maurier in *Trilby*, which Showalter refers to as “almost self-hypnotic” (“Intro. to *Trilby*” xiii), is an idiosyncratic expression of this kind of bodily memory, mediated through the senses, in which what doesn’t really exist is created through interaction with the surrounding physical environment. As such, Du Maurier’s nostalgia is hysterical.<sup>99</sup> But the filling of a conspicuous void through the nostalgic recombination of fragments that as a reconstituted whole may or may not have some basis in reality, does not make the materiality of the act less palpable. The link

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<sup>98</sup> For a discussion of the intimate connection between haptic experiences, human identity, and the space we occupy, see Bloomer and Moore’s *Body, Memory, and Architecture*. In their opinion, “the most fundamental organizing principle in the formation of our body image is that *we unconsciously locate our bodies inside a three-dimensional boundary*” (37). Also pertinent here is their use of the term “bodyscape” (35) rather than simply body in reference to the body as unified whole, or complete experience.

<sup>99</sup> I refer to “hysterical” in the clinical sense, although some have also found Du Maurier’s text hysterical according to current common usage of that term, as evinced by Joseph Bristow in his discussion of Du Maurier’s nostalgic descriptions of Paris in *Trilby*. “The narrator’s exuberant depiction of a “beautiful” life that prospers both indoors and outdoors among the bohemian dirt,” he writes “sustains its enthusiasm in an unsophisticated style whose amateurism becomes plain through the daft repetition of such epithets” (158).

between memory, photographic and phonographic technology, and their ability to record and reproduce the past (and also manipulate it, as Vrettos points out (14)), is made explicit by Du Maurier in Peter Ibbetson. Nostalgia, as an idiosyncratic form of memory – although it is uncertain whether such distinctions have a solid foundation – also produces a cinematographic effect of slow motion, in its association of the past with a slowing down of time, a rather ironic antidote in the context of an increasingly technological environment in which the body operates or is carried precipitously along, as was suggested in chapter 3, in a sort of soporific stupor.

If memories become building materials, let us recall Livingston's statement that what is primary about a house is the fact that it is made of rooms. In this context, memories function interactively with *selfness*, but what are the rooms, the self-contained units of the self? Freud's contention, in a piece of writing aptly titled "Architecture of Hysteria," was that the psychic topology of the hysteric could be accessed by exploring "phantasies," erected as psychic facades to bar access to traumatic memory. Phantasies thus serve the dual purpose of "refining the memories" and of "sublimating them" (qtd. in Bronfen, The Knotted Subject 254), much in the way that nostalgic recollection does. While Du Maurier displays an hysterical strategy in Trilby, laying out a neat phantasmatic floor plan for the compartmentalization of idiosyncratic memory, Vrettos claims that Peter Ibbetson "extols memory's power to escape the prison house of the mind" (14). This statement seems almost paradoxical in its suggestion that the mind is structured like a prison – one might imagine panoptic, self-regulating – and that memory allows for the building of a parallel self on a

different site, drawn from the suturing of ancestral fragments. This sort of self recalls the composite monstrousness of Frankenstein's progeny, Villiers's Hadaly, or the strange recombinant quality of the *Surmâle*.<sup>100</sup> The very parcellated quality of this construction implies, according to Vrettos, that the "individual personality becomes virtually unrecognizable—dispersed over time and space, and merged with human history through hauntingly familiar "echoes in the chamber of the brain"" (18). "The singularity of selfhood" (Vrettos 18) is indeed replaced by a multiplicity that lodges itself in the individual organism, ready to provide a recording of the past that may be reproduced down the generations (and sometimes, perhaps, along squiggly, illegible degenerative lines).

Returning to Verne and Conan Doyle's texts, the likening of the baron de Gortz and Sir John Bollamore to their respective residences reveals, in the interplay between ruined physical building and the crumbling degeneration of the mind, a means of entry into what could be construed as labyrinthian constructions, theoretically over time if not in the immediacy of the textual material. Unlike the obscure didacticism of Villiers or Jarry's dense surrealistic musings, Verne and Conan Doyle's literary approach is far more straightforward. But whether a text appears to be travelling straight forward or backward, most likely it is moving unsteadily in both directions at once. The analogy between mind and house reveals broader Victorian, or more generally nineteenth-century concerns. Pamela Thurschwell explains that "if the mind were structured like a

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<sup>100</sup> For a thorough exploration of monstrousness as an expression of sutured, composite bodies, see Judith Halberstam's *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters*.

haunted house, the hope was that science stretched far enough, would be capable of exploring its hidden rooms” (15-16).<sup>101</sup> Beyond providing a personality profile of the individual, however, unlocking the secret compartments of the human mind was seen as simultaneously producing a “key to the collective mental features buried within an apparently fragmented society” (Winter 12). Furthermore, the helter-skelter association of sciences and pseudo-sciences such as phrenology, physiognomy and craniology linked the structure of these gothic mansions of the mind to that of the face and skull, claiming that from these physical indices the “aggregate psyche of a population” could be traced (Winter 12). The co-existence of new psychological phenomena such as hypnotism and hysteria with that of the physiological sciences points to a seemingly antagonistic relationship in which there is a concerted effort to “set the mind free of its materialist moorings” (Thurschwell 15) while simultaneously anchoring it firmly in its physical structure. In truth, the two are not mutually

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<sup>101</sup> Thurschwell identifies this goal as being one of the Society for Psychical Research, founded in 1882, particular in the study of “new phenomena in psychology such as hypnotism, hysteria, aphasias and multiple personalities. The relationship between scientific and scientific, and the establishing and defining of legitimate scientific practice were major nineteenth-century concerns. Thurschwell describes psychical research as being “dismissed as a pseudo-science, an embarrassing sideline to the otherwise serious careers of figures such as William James, Henri Bergson, Henry Sidgwick” (1), respectively an American psychologist and philosopher, a French philosopher who published texts on numerous subjects including memory, and an English utilitarian philosopher. The same has been said of Jean-Martin Charcot’s “unscientific forays into hysteria and hypnotism” in the treatment of his hysterical patients (Leighton 104). Nevertheless, beginning with James Braid’s coining of the term hypnotism (derived from “hypnotic,” “already in use to denote a soporific” (Leighton 106)), which he described as a form of “rational mesmerism” (*Observations on Trance* vi) while dismissing the sexual associations of mesmeric “passes,” magnetic fluids and the personal relationship between mesmerist and subject (Thurschwell 41) and perhaps culminating in Freud and Breuer’s cathartic therapy (see *Studies on Hysteria*), a certain scientific and medical legitimacy was established for the practice of hypnosis despite its more theatrical qualities. Leighton argues that mesmerism and hypnotism “developed in relation to a medical profession that was itself attempting to accrue an authority that has now become naturalized for us” (106). For a summary of mesmeric practice from Mesmer’s “animal magnetism” to Charcot’s “scientific hypnotism,” see Bellour’s *Le Corps du cinéma* 37). On the paradoxical nature of Charcot’s reinvention of hypnosis as “scientific hypnotism,” creating the illusion of legitimate scientific practice while he in effect developed a “recipe for hysteria,” see Didi-Huberman’s *Invention of Hysteria* 184-185. See also Bourneville and Regnard’s *Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière*, 1879-1880, pages 149-173.



exclusive, we are dealing merely with a question of scale. One could use the telegraph or the telephone, or for that matter the phonograph, as technological metaphor for such conflicting notions: the message seems divorced from any apparent materiality, floating freely, telepathically in defiance of space and time, but it is only that the vast network of electrical signals is imperceptible. Physical traces can be detected upon arrival. Of course, the odd incidence of attempting to arrest the message in its materiality mid-transit did occur, as with Edison's attempts to hear through his teeth by biting down on the piano while the pianists he was auditioning played, the vibrations resonating through his skull bones (Picker 133).

If Edison's bizarre evening rituals could be explained by his increasing deafness, George Du Maurier it seems owed, according to Henry James, a rather uncanny ability to detect the materiality of the voice to his impaired vision.<sup>102</sup> "It seemed to me that he almost *saw* the voice, as he saw the features and limbs," wrote James. "He talked of it ever as if he could draw it and would particularly like to" (601). In a sense, this is precisely the sort of exercise that Du Maurier could be described as attempting in *Trilby*, in a series of passages where the architecture of her body is mapped out in increasingly sinister fashion by Svengali.<sup>103</sup> "Himmel!" exclaims Svengali as he peers into Trilby's open mouth. "The roof of your mouth is

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<sup>102</sup> While an art student in Paris, George Du Maurier suffered a detachment of the retina, followed by a haemorrhage at the back of his eye. Unsurprisingly, Du Maurier was instructed to take a preparation of mercury three times a day. See Ormond 47; see also Bristow 159.

<sup>103</sup> In an effective pun that picks up on the subtle interplay between the psychical and the physical, Showalter claims that "like Charcot and Freud, Svengali sees women's bodies as 'cases'. In a series, of remarkable speeches," she adds, "he anatomizes Trilby, imagining her first as a hollow architectural construction, then as a body for dissection in the morgue, and finally as a medical exhibit in the École de Médecine in a 'nice little mahogany glass case'" ("Intro. to *Trilby*" xx).

like the dome of the Panthéon; there is room in it for “toutes les gloires de la France,” and a little to spare! The entrance to your throat is like the middle porch of St Sulpice when the doors are open for the faithful on All Saint’s Day; and not one tooth is missing – thirty-two British teeth as white as milk and as big as knuckle-bones! (...) and the bridge of your nose is like the belly of a Stradivarius – what a sounding-board!” (51). Svengali’s eulogistic, hyperbolic description of the “monumental repository” (Auerbach 283) that is Trilby’s vocal apparatus identifies her as a particularly solid construction with infinite storage capacity. While this may seem to contradict the fragility of her psyche – we are told that “she had a singularly impressionable nature, as was shown by her quick and ready susceptibility to Svengali’s hypnotic influence” (Du Maurier, *Trilby* 53) – it is in fact the hollow capaciousness of her solid constitution that allows the trance-inducing invocation of “*Svengali, Svengali, Svengali!*” to go on “ringing in her head and ears” like bells from the acoustically resonant and lofty heights of a belfry. The connection between Trilby’s psyche and her sound physical structure established, how does one then account for the eventual crumbling “into the dust” of “her artificial edifice as an aloof diva” (Bristow 175)?

Something about the “thirty-two British teeth as big as knuckle-bones” seems to evoke a graveyard where the tombstones are all neatly aligned, insinuating a tone of morbidity into the text. Indeed, as Svengali’s ardent admiration for Trilby increases, his appreciation takes on a distinctly more macabre turn. “What a beautiful skeleton you will make!” he exclaims (92), as he greedily eyes Trilby like a “big hungry

spider”<sup>104</sup> (51) or, in this instance, more appropriately like a rabid dog baring his “big yellow teeth” in a “mongrel canine snarl” (92). Berating her for ignoring his advances, Svengali proceeds to predict for her a future as a skeleton on display which he will condescend to visit:

You shall have a nice little mahogany glass case all to yourself in the museum of the École de Médecine, and Svengali shall come in his new fur-lined coat, smoking his big cigar of the Havana, and push the dirty carabins out of the way, and look through the holes of your eyes into your stupid empty skull, and up the nostrils of your high, bony sounding-board of a nose without either a tip or a lip to it, and into the roof of your big mouth, with your thirty-two big English teeth, and between your ribs into your big chest (...). And then he will look all down your bones to your poor crumbling feet” (92).

Ashes to ashes and dust to dust, as the saying goes. In Svengali’s ghoulish portrait of Trilby, the edifice begins its crumbling at the foundation – the very foundation, it should be added, of her Trilbyness. There would be cause to consider this bare bones structure of Trilby, this potentially last incarnation from which all flesh has ironically been stripped, unsteady. The passage is unquestionably reminiscent of Miserrimus Dexter’s ghastly collection of curiosities in The Law and the Lady, but where Dexter accumulates objects which seem imbued with the disturbing aura of unnatural relics, Svengali participates in the anatomization of Trilby, sketching her interior structure and effectively turning her inside out. Interpreted this way, the passage bears more resemblance to Edison’s painstaking dissection of the *andréide* Hadaly in L’Éve future. Elizabeth Bronfen observes that the spectacular display of dead, particularly female

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<sup>104</sup> An illustration of Svengali as a spider with a human head entitled ‘An Incubus’ accompanies the passage in which Svengali lustily surveys Trilby’s skeleton. Omitted from certain editions, it can be found in the recent Broadview Press edition, which is a facsimile reprint of the Osgood, McIlvain & Co. edition of 1895, published with all 120 illustrations.

bodies, became an activity of aesthetic pleasure in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. “In this period,” she writes, “morgues were visited like picture galleries” (Over Her Dead Body 87). Svengali and Dexter’s strange appetite for morbidity does, it seem, have precedents. Female death does seem to be, as Bronfen suggests, the “epitome of tropes” (Over Her Dead Body 1). Even the trio of Little Billee, the Laird and Taffy are not immune to its erotic appeal. As Trilby wastes away before their eyes, she seems to grow more beautiful “in spite of,” or perhaps we may argue because of, “her increasing pallor and emaciation – her skin was so pure and white and delicate, and the bones of her face so admirable!” (266).<sup>105</sup>

What is most interesting is the repeated referrals to Trilby’s bone structure. Trilby seems to achieve the pinnacle of her beauty when her inner structure pierces the outer. There are certain nineteenth-century architectural parallels that echo this turning of the innards outward, or that confuse the boundaries between inside and out, what is structure and what is environment. The Eiffel Tower was one such example of spatial collapse, ill received by those who thought it a distasteful display of iron viscera. A more palatable edifice was the Crystal Palace, where “nature and technology, exterior and *intérieur*” appeared reconciled in the glass walls which acted as both “membrane and solid body” (Asendorf 26) allowing the exchange between interior space and environment to occur. Christoph Asendorf notes how the Crystal Palace became an icon, “a building met with nearly religious veneration,” and which inspired the sort of

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<sup>105</sup> As an interesting aside, Bram Dijkstra records that nineteenth-century female artists, resignedly, or perhaps willingly, followed the Trilby fad, depicting the “sensuously dead heroine” as adeptly as their male colleagues (58).

reverential shudders one might associate with the sublime (24).<sup>106</sup> Hosting “The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations” in 1851, the Crystal Palace functioned, according to Herbert Sussman, “as a temple devoted to the belief that England’s technological progress manifested the Will of God” (55). In her lofty, monumental scale and the physical evidence of her structural secrets, Trilby is upgraded from musty Victorian mansion to sublime technological construct, worthy of adoration whether she embodies the erect and aloof diva La Svengali, or is reduced to the wan, crumbling figure on her deathbed, “hopelessly ill and insane” (Du Maurier, Trilby 265), “wasting and fading away from sheer general atrophy” (Du Maurier, Trilby 264). In truth, edifices of veneration follow a logical (d)evolution to their eventual reduction to sites of ruin, to which admirers may make pilgrimages in the hopes of capturing something of the elusive aura that infused their walls when they were proudly erect. Should we be surprised if the building, scattered into its constituents like a saint is disseminated into relics, seems to carry more sublime beauty and seems to speak more hauntingly from its crumbling, history-imbedded walls than it did when it was a cohesive structure? As edifice of worship, Trilby’s voicefulness is “portentous” and belongs to the angels (Du Maurier, Trilby 12).<sup>107</sup>

The underlying morbidity that lies in the secret corners of even in the brightest example of technologically progressive construction was not lost on the German art

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<sup>106</sup> Asendorf points out that the glass wall “has a prototype in the Gothic church window,” therefore making the connection between the structure of the Crystal Palace and religious symbolism concrete, pardon the (rather inappropriate in this instance) pun (26). For additional information on the architectural specifics of the Crystal Palace, see Sussman’s Victorian Technology 56-59.

<sup>107</sup> We are told that Trilby had “a portentous voice of great volume, and that might almost have belonged to any sex (even an angel’s)” (12).

historian Julius Lessing who, in his admiration for the Crystal Palace, described it as embodying the feelings evoked by old fairy tales, the ones in which the princess lies “in a glass coffin” (qtd. in Asendorf 26). From there it is only a short journey to the little mahogany glass case of the École de Médecine, and to the sort of silence that inevitably accompanies contemplative appraisal.

### **Voicelessness: Hysterical Strategies of Regulated Construction**

Buildings resonate with the sound or silence of whoever or whatever inhabits them. If they are not haunted, they are at the very least possessed. Conversely, a building’s structure has an inevitable impact on the physical trajectories of its inhabitants, and more insidiously on their psychic organization. Beyond the individual (little mahogany glass) case history, the interplay between interior and exterior construct carries a broader resonance. Stepping away from the periphery of abstraction into more concrete space, Regenia Gagnier points out the conspicuous uniformity of Victorian housing. “What is interesting from our perspective,” she affirms, “is not only that the houses were so architecturally uniform indoors and out, but that the habits of those within them were equally regulated and systematized” (“Literary Alternatives to Rational Choice” 35). The active rejection of choice, the “mindless adherence to opinion and manners” (Gagnier, “Literary Alternatives to Rational Choice” 35) displayed by the Victorian middle class seems to have an affinity, or bear a family resemblance to a sort of hysterical compliance. Treatises on crowd psychology, imitation, and psychological automatism scrutinized, catalogued and criticized – or

praised – such social phenomena. For British essayist Walter Bagehot, a nation meant a “LIKE body of men” who were “capable of acting together” and “inclined to obey similar rules” because of that likeness (20).<sup>108</sup> Far from proving a detraction, this sort of unified submission to the greater structure meant that “control over nature and its environment” and the imposition of the nation’s will on other nations would be facilitated, hence asserting British superiority (Gagnier, “Literary Alternatives to Rational Choice” 27). Adherence to rules, however, was not to be confused with simple mimicry. In Bagehot’s opinion, mimicry was the domain of savage nations, children, and the uneducated. “This extreme propensity to imitation is one great reason of the amazing sameness which every observer notices in savage nations” (68). Although unlikely that the average Victorian would experience enough “savagery” to verify his claim, Bagehot’s insinuation that no hierarchy can exist where there is innate mediocrity does not dispel the threat that the more ambitious “uneducated” might climb up the ladder if they could convincingly imitate behaviours dictated by social convention.<sup>109</sup>

The flip side of the coin of social cohesion, particularly as the nineteenth century accelerated toward its close, was a tendency to be lured by the effects of modernity “made manifest in the powers of demagogues to captivate mass audiences in newly democratized societies; in the strangely autonomous life of the “crowd”; in the

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<sup>108</sup> Alison Winter underscores the Lamarckian connotations of Bagehot’s vision of the formation of a social collective. “As an aggregate,” she writes, “people’s individual changes contributed to a collective and evolving reflex apparatus, in which each generation passed on greater structure, strength, and discipline to the next” (337-338).

<sup>109</sup> See Regenia Gagnier, “Literary Alternatives to Rational Choice” 36.

beguiling effects of mass culture; in the hyperstimulating effects on the psyche of rapid social and technological changes” (Saler 707). The autonomy of the crowd here reflects on a macro level Regenia Gagnier’s affirmation that the “modern bourgeois subject was “autonomous”” in the sense of “self-regulating” (Gagnier, The Insatiability of Human Wants 117). The transition from autonomous to automatous can be effected convincingly is one considers first, that both terms imply self-regulation, and second, the discursive environment in which notions of automatism and its relation to human psychology came uncannily to life. The idea that the mind could be treated as a physiological apparatus whose particular mechanisms could be studied in order to understand how it functioned in both normal and pathological or, using Henry Maudsley’s term, “*unsound*” states (The Physiology and Pathology of the Mind v; my emphasis), led to speculation across a variety of disciplines that behaviours and the thought process itself relied at least partially on an automatous response to the surrounding environment. Maudsley’s contention, drawing on such work as that of William Benjamin Carpenter and Herbert Spencer, that “a large part of human activity notably takes place without the voluntary control, or even without any consciousness on the part of the individual” (The Physiology and Pathology of the Mind 63)<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Maudsley would also maintain in Body and Mind (1870) that “acts consciously designed at first may, by repetition, become unconscious and automatic” and furthermore that “the automatic acts, whether primary or secondary, in the frog or in the man, which are excited by the suitable external stimulus, may also be excited by an act of will, by an impulse coming downwards from the brain. (...) This is a consideration of the utmost importance, for it exhibits how great a part of our voluntary acts is really the automatic action of the spinal cord” (11-12). The lead up to such observations included William Benjamin Carpenter’s discussion of “unconscious cerebration,” initially advanced in 1854 (see Principles of Human Physiology 589) and Herbert Spencer’s notions of the effects of reflex action on psychical life (see Principles of Psychology 428-431), in a broader context of what Carpenter refers to as the “doctrine of Human Automatism” (viii). For an extremely useful timeline of developments in physiology and psychology across Europe beginning in 1843, including the publication of relevant works of fiction, see The Mind of Modernism, ed. Mark S. Micale.



suggests that human beings engage in distinctly automatic operations of exchange, right up to the psychical level, encapsulating the broader nineteenth-century concern, in the wake of modern hyperstimulation, that there was something of the machine in the ghost, or, drawing from a freudian interpretation of the uncanny, that there was something which did not belong to the house but which resided (not to say lived) there nevertheless, suggesting that the soul<sup>111</sup> was no longer the master of its own house (Sirois-Trahan 202).

In response to such speculation, and to Thomas Huxley's "Conscious-Automaton-theory" (W. James 1) more specifically, William James published an article entitled "Are We Automata?," dismissing with a question mark Huxley's confident assertion that animals were indeed automata, or Julien Offray de La Mettrie's bold statement a century earlier that man was a machine. James used a Darwinian argument to suggest that since consciousness is at its maximum "where the nervous system is highly evolved" (4), it stood to reason that its utility consisted of allowing the human being to "choose out of the manifold experiences present to it at a given time some one for particular accentuation, and to ignore the rest" (9) ensuring its survival and its active role at the helm of its own activity. "I shall now show," asserted James confidently, "how, from its simplest to its most complicated forms, it exerts this function with unremitting industry" (9). The autopoietic resonance of such statements does not, from our perspective, guarantee the human organism's break from other self-organizing apparatus.

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<sup>111</sup> The use of the word "soul" is not straightforward and will be discussed further down this chapter.

A decade later, the question was far from resolved, and some of the more compelling texts on the subject were published across the Channel, unsurprisingly a few years after Jean-Martin Charcot's *Leçons du mardi*, his hypnoid Tuesdays at the Salpêtrière had contributed to his increasing notoriety. Pierre Janet's influential L'automatisme psychologique (1889) argued that automatism could be reconciled with consciousness, therefore espousing a hybrid theory of man as part automaton, part sensitive, sentient being (2). Much of Janet's work, like that of many of his contemporaries and of Carpenter before him, would be based on observation of and experimentation with somnambolic states. These states, in Gabriel Tarde's opinion, were not innocuous. An individual wandering in the confused fog of mindless adherence had not only a detrimental effect on his peers, but was symptomatic of a larger social problem. "Supposez un somnambule qui pousse l'imitation de son médium jusqu'à devenir médium lui-même et magnétiser un tiers, lequel à son tour l'imitera, et ainsi de suite," he speculated in Les lois de l'imitation (1890). "N'est-ce pas là la vie sociale?" (108).<sup>112</sup>

Still, if the social body was at stake, it was the body of the woman that was its ultimate scapegoat. Gustave Le Bon's study of crowd psychology asserted that living beings, irrespective of whether they were animals or humans, had an instinctive need to obey a leader (105).<sup>113</sup> A similar claim would be put forward by the short-lived

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<sup>112</sup> In *Svengali's Web*, Daniel Pick argues that modernity was particularly conducive to producing "epidemics of hysteria and hypnoid confusion" on account of the public's subjection to "an impossible succession of commercial, political and social pressures, strained by the speed, confusion, industrial complexity, motley information, sexual hypocrisies and general urban confusion of the day" (82).

<sup>113</sup> "Dès qu'un certain nombre d'êtres vivants sont réunis, qu'il s'agisse d'un troupeau d'animaux ou d'une foule d'hommes, ils se placent d'instinct sous l'autorité d'un chef" (Le Bon 105).

Austrian philosopher Otto Weininger, with the distinction that women were mercilessly targeted as the inherently submissive, compliant subjects of Man's natural leadership. According to Daniel Pick, Weininger believed that "women were *in need of* psychological domination," that "this was their essential womanhood. They demanded only to be desired physically, to be taken possession of, 'like a new property'"(65).<sup>114</sup> Women's activity was thus limited to actively choosing passivity, if it could even be considered a conscious choice. Mary Russo observes that in Du Maurier's text "the monumental figure of La Svengali" neatly fitting into "the doll's-house scale of bourgeois fantasy" attests to "the ideological compulsion to put the female body back in its domestic place," (153) even as Trilby's inner cavity is surveyed "like a topographic map of Europe" (149). The idea that women could be inhabited, moved into the way one would move into a new house is especially compelling in this context. Possession implies the desire to sculpt the female body's scale into something more navigable, and more familiar. Once the gothic mansion of her mind has been taken possession of, one would assume that man would be free to regulate her behaviours from the interior and to redesign, or at least redecorate at will, the effects of which would be visible across her entire surface. There has been a surge of scholarly interest in the nineteenth-century diagnosis and treatment of hysteria, and the conceptualization of the woman as property to be evaluated, possessed, and redesigned strongly recalls

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<sup>114</sup> Weininger made other peculiar claims in Sex and Character, one of them linking the "greater articulation of the psychic data in Man" to the "sharper outlines of his physique and face, as opposed to the softness, roundness, and indeterminacy of the genuine female figure and physiognomy" (89). This is interesting when considered in the context of Trilby's androgynous beauty, and the singular angularity of her bone structure. Sex and Character was, however, published in 1903, almost a full decade after Trilby. Weininger also maintained that while some women displayed some of the characteristics of genius, "*there is no female genius, there never has been one*" (163).

recent interpretation of the locus of the hysterical apparatus as being the doctor's appropriation of the (essentially female)<sup>115</sup> body of the hysteric, which he may then reinterpret and rewrite, enunciating his findings, and perhaps his hubris, by projecting himself through his patient's body.<sup>116</sup> The body of the hysteric emerges as both empty architectural construct – "the surface of an "inside" [which], like a vessel, conveys or displays the traces of a secret history" (Ender 20) – and technological mechanism, ready to bear inscription, or ready to be erased and rerecorded. As Janet Beizer articulates it, the hysteric's body "was defined by the absence of its woman's voice" (11-12). Aphonia, the inability to speak, would become one of the defining characteristics of the hysteric (Connor 333).<sup>117</sup> These "devocalized bodies" (Beizer 12) again point to a construction that is conspicuously unsound. They simultaneously evoke a prosthetic apparatus – comparable to the telephone, or the phonograph, or the sort of technology that would compel Freud to speculate on man's prosthetic godliness

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<sup>115</sup> While male hysteria was acknowledged, it seems that an overwhelming number of women were afflicted by hysteria, despite the fact that the term itself had moved away from its greek etymological localization in the uterus. Didi-Huberman points to the fact that while men entered the Salpêtrière in 1981, the first photograph of a male hysteric only appears in the *Iconographie* of 1888. Dictionaries of 1889 still referred to hysteria as the "feminine temperament turned into neurosis" (Didi-Huberman 80). In his important treatise on hysteria, Pierre Briquet concluded that women were twenty times more likely to be affected by hysteria than men (36).

<sup>116</sup> A plethora of excellent studies of hysteria in the nineteenth century have been published over the last thirty years or so. Some of the ones that have informed my work, particularly as they provide analysis of literary (or visual) representation of hysterical phenomena, include Janet Beizer's *Ventriloquized Bodies*, Didi-Huberman's *Invention of Hysteria* (initially published as *Invention de l'hystérie* in 1982, this work focuses on the Salpêtrière's creation of the spectacle of hysteria through its own iconography), Evelyne Ender's *Sexing the Mind*, Elaine Showalter's *The Female Malady*, Elisabeth Bronfen's *The Knotted Subject*. Asti Hustvedt's doctoral dissertation *Science Fictions: Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's L'Ève future and Late Nineteenth-Century Medical Constructions of Femininity* has also been a valuable resource (she has since published a book on the culture of hysteria in nineteenth-century Paris entitled *Medical Muses*).

<sup>117</sup> See also Claire Kahane, who links the epidemic sweep of hysteria across Europe, defined by aphonia and paralysis, with the increase in the presence of female orators (7).

– through which the doctor may phantasmatically augment his projections of himself.<sup>118</sup> Both doctor and patient, whether the respective roles are literal or represent a broader abstract of man and woman or a similarly dichotomized relationship that suggests a master/slave dialectic, become hybrid organisms. “Aussi arrive-t-il parfois,” wrote Gabriel Tarde significantly, “que le vainqueur est magnétisé par le vaincu” (108).<sup>119</sup> In the same way the house exerts its influence on those who inhabit it and are constrained to operate within the space that often resists rearrangement.

The voice is a point of convergence on which the blueprints for body building can be mapped out. As Steven Connor has emphasized, “speech represented the ultimate challenge for the makers of automata, because speech was the most plausible proof that the automaton was truly self-moving, or even, as we might nowadays say, self-organizing” (340). While voice and speech are not direct equivalents – in a sense speech is a sort of prosthetic apparatus for the voice – the two are intimately connected, and it is this intimacy that causes the appropriation of speech, the ventriloquizing of the vocal apparatus to produce such an uncanny effect, in the sense of the unhomely, the haunted, and the secret (or the secret compartments) come to light.<sup>120</sup> As Little Billee,

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<sup>118</sup> Terry Castle reminds us that the first OED entry for the word “phantasmagoria” defines it as “a name invented for an exhibition of optical illusions produced chiefly by means of the magic lantern, first exhibited in London in 1802” (27). Castle’s article seeks to re-establish the connection between post-enlightenment technology and the notion of phantasmagoria (rather than merely suggesting a spectral apparition), which contradicts Steven Connor’s equating of phantasmal and mechanical with the disembodied and the re-embodied respectively (363). The two terms, it would seem, do not represent two opposite extremities, but rather share a historical affinity. The notions of disembodiment and re-embodiment do, however, continue to operate through both the phantasmatic and the mechanical.

<sup>119</sup> Discussing Svengali’s love of his creation, the diva La Svengali, as it is portrayed in the novel and in the numerous subsequent film adaptations, Daniel Pick asks “how far is ‘being in love with the object’ the same as being psychologically enslaved by it” (11). Is the magnetizer in fact magnetized?

<sup>120</sup> These various definitions are drawn from Freud’s 1919 essay on the uncanny.

the Laird and Taffy realize, upon attending La Svengali's concert, that the diva is in fact Trilby, we are told that there is "something, to them, so strange and uncanny about it all; so oppressive, so anxious, so momentous!" (210). Their reaction seems to converge elements of both the uncanny and of a Burkian sublime, and the ambivalence of their reaction is in direct proportion to the generous stature of Trilby's frame and the magnitude of her seemingly infinite voice which, defying traditional spatial layout "was so immense in its softness, richness, freshness, that it seemed to be pouring itself out from all round" (Du Maurier, Trilby 210). If we consider Jentsch's hypothesis that a sense of the uncanny is evoked when there are "doubts as to whether an apparently animate being is really alive; or conversely, whether a lifeless object might not be in fact animate" (qtd. in Freud, "The Uncanny" 5),<sup>121</sup> Svengali's colonizing of Trilby's immense interiority and usurping of her "phenomenal larynx" (Du Maurier, Trilby 221) suggests an act of protean creation of sinister dimensions. Janet Beizer points out the (uncanny) resemblance between nineteenth-century illustrations of the larynx and external female genitals, adding that "assimilations of female vocal and sexual organs were not uncommon" (46). Svengali's act of ventriloquism with Trilby's body could be interpreted as a necrophilic violation of space, if one considers the voice as –

### **The Fragile Structure of the Soul**

"Sa voix...sa voix!...répétait-il. Son âme...l'âme de la Stilla...Elle est brisée...brisée...brisée!..." (Verne Le Château des Carpates 216)

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<sup>121</sup> For Robert Plank, drawing on historical definitions of the uncanny, "the relationship between man/machine comes to its most interesting point when the question of the machine's possibly being alive is raised" (76).

Is it outrageous to talk about the technology of the soul, or soulful technology?

“Technologies,” writes Jonathan Sterne, “are repeatable social, cultural, and material processes crystallized into mechanisms” (8). Understanding technological emergence, however, is not only based on the awareness of the networks embedded within social systems, but also on the more immediately material level of biological equivalences. An antiquated formulation interprets the voice as being caused by “soul, in whose service there are five “instruments”: the lung, the trachea, the larynx, the glottis, and the palate” (Suarez qtd in Des Chenes 79). The correlation between developing technologies and human augmentation having been discussed in the preceding and current chapters, what is particularly interesting in this last formulation is the outright addition of the intangible spark of life, not in the guise of electrical current, obviously, but in that of missing mechanical element, to the human equation. To this element the individual parts subordinate, in the image of the nineteenth-century workers encased in gargantuan factories, surrounded by the outsized dimensions of demented mechanical sound, *unsound par excellence*. Which leads in a sort of roundabout way back to Felicia Miller-Frank’s translation of La Svengali’s “*hors-sens*” voice as a “voice beyond hearing or beyond thought” (14). This is one possible translation, but what about the idea of a voice that is confounding, beyond sense? Hors-sense and non-sense are cohabiting cubicles in those tight human headquarters, separated only by a hallway of hysterics who circulate sandwiched between the two. This last sentence is perhaps

my own alliterate nonsense. Some ideas would be out with the trash if the loonies weren't on the other side of the bin.

The transition from non-sense, confoundedness and confusion to outright insanity is one that needs to be attributed its own contextual space. If the Salpêtrières's records, for example, provides a visual essay – perhaps more accurately a diary entry – of a particularly nineteenth-century form of madness, Ender's claim that “nineteenth-century fantasies of hysteria often turn around a woman on the eve of marriage (literally or figuratively)” (14), provides the locus for the literary expression of such hysterical forms and figures. Ender's statement applies to both *Trilby* and *la Stilla*.<sup>122</sup> It is *Trilby*'s acceptance of Little Billee's marriage proposal and her subsequent confrontation with his mother which leads to her running away, being taken in by Svengali and undergoing her eventual metamorphosis into his hysterical, sublime ventriloquist's apparatus. *La Stilla*'s (little mahogany glass) case is slightly less linear in that her affliction begins with a neurasthenic state caused by the insistent, hypnotic stare of the baron de Gortz, which follows her from performance to performance, and in the quieter space in between her own two ears, in defiance of geographical distances. The cure for the prima-donna's nervous condition appears to be marriage to Franz de

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<sup>122</sup> One of the most memorable models for the mad siren, in this instance on the night of her wedding to a man she doesn't love, is unquestionably Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*. An in-depth discussion of the 1835 opera is beyond the scope of this chapter, but it would be interesting to compare the use of vocally demanding bel canto in the “mad scene” with expressions of evil genius or musical genius in *Trilby*. In one of Du Maurier's numerous little literary derailings in *Trilby*, he talks about Herr Blagner (a satirical reference to Richard Wagner)'s “intemperate diatribe” regarding the “tyranny of the prima donna call ‘Svengalismus’,” in which he describes the “base acrobaticism of the vocal chords, a hysteric appeal to morbid Gallic ‘sentimentalismus’; and that this monstrous development of the phenomenal larynx, this degrading cultivation and practice of the abnormalism of a mere physical peculiarity, are death and destruction to all true music” (221). What we may interpret here as coloratura was practiced by those other exponents of vocal “abnormalismus,” the castrati.



Télek, and with it retirement from the stage. It is this announcement which leads the baron to jealously and vampirically absorb her voice, which had become “nécessaire à sa vie comme l’air qu’il respirait” (Verne, *Château des Carpathes* 129) into a phonograph and her body into a series of mirrors, reducing – or simply translating, which is often reductive anyway – her being into a technological phantasm of sound and light. “La Stilla,” argues Miller-Frank, “is silent. Her voice, like her image, is a simulacrum” (167). But once again, should we be questioning whether la Stilla is, in effect, silent or more accurately *unsound*? According to Richer and Gilles de la Tourette in an 1889 article on hypnotism published in the Dictionnaire encyclopédique des sciences médicales, “il suffit de placer une main sur le front du sujet et l’autre sur la nuque, pour le transformer (...) en véritable phonographe d’Edison” (qtd in Marquer 345).<sup>123</sup> Thus the relationship between hysteric and phonographic technology is made explicit.<sup>124</sup> According to the British Medical Journal, Trilby might have convincingly passed as a case study for such hypnotic subjection.<sup>125</sup> As simulacrum and as technological phantasm, la Stilla transitions from live performance to a theatricality

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<sup>123</sup> I won’t get into Tourette’s syndrome in this essay, but Janet Beizer does discuss the hysteria and involuntary profanity. See the section entitled “Regulating Hysteria: Logorrhea,” pp. 43 to 48. This section also includes a nineteenth-century illustration of the opening of the larynx looking distinctly like female genitalia, locating speech in the grotesque substrata explored by Mary Russo in The Female Grotesque.

<sup>124</sup> For a discussion of musical metaphors used to describe the way in which doctors could “play” the brains of their patients, see Winter p.63 and Leighton p.127.

<sup>125</sup> An October 1895 article entitled “The Hypnosis of “Trilby”” (which humorously follows an entry on “Lunatics at Large”) praises Du Maurier’s accurate depiction of “perfect hypnotic subjection.” “Trilby,” it is stated, “is in a perfect hypnotic sleep; she is unconscious of her audience and unaware of her surroundings. She is, like all thorough hypnotics, reduced to the state of a marvellous machine” (1052). The validity of hypnotism, however, as medical practice was not confirmed by the British Medical Journal. See the Feb. 19, 1898 entry “The British Medical Association and Hypnotism” (513). See also Leighton’s article “Hypnosis Redivivus”: Ernest Hart, “British Medical Journal,” and the Hypnotism Controversy.

akin to cinematographic projection, the picture having, with a Vernian quality of anticipation, an (un)soundtrack.<sup>126</sup> La Stilla's hysteria is technological in the strictest sense, her transformation into Edison's phonograph literal.

How much is this vocal<sup>127</sup>/voiceless form of madness triggered or suffocated by the contours of the space in which it develops? Ender, borrowing some of the turn of her phrase from the correspondence of Henry James, argues that hysteria, as a designation of woman's conscience, confirms her affiliation to "the deep domestic moral affectional realm" (15), a realm which, if we recall Regenia Gagnier's argument, is "regulated and systematized." According to Picker, in a discussion of Conan Doyle's 1891 short story "The Voice of Science," in which a phonograph is used to reveal the rather vulgar character of an unfit suitor, "the quiet, repressive drone of the mechanism of social convention" is what turns out to be the real voice of science (129). The phonograph itself appears confined (and perhaps confounded) by these repressive mechanisms. "Of course the poor thing can say nothing except what is said to it," observes Mrs. Esdaile with what reads like compassion. "You always know exactly what is coming" (Conan Doyle, "The Voice of Science"). Yet what comes out of the phonograph is *not* what is expected, and so the apparatus in Conan Doyle's story seems

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<sup>126</sup> Whether the play of mirrors shares a greater affinity with the magic lantern or with the cinematograph is debatable, the projection being equal parts phantasmagoric magic trick ("trucs" 220) and realistic reflection (réflexion, aussi "réelle" que lorsqu'elle était pleine de vie" 219) which operates with enough complexity to convincingly bring La Stilla back to life, which differs marginally from raising her from the dead but keeping her within the boundaries of the afterlife. Magic lantern shows would of course also be performed with accompanying sound designed to produce certain desired effects, but not the soundtrack - synchronized with its corresponding projection - imagined by Verne, which is made possible in his text with the advent of the phonograph. For a history of the phantasmagorical uses of the magic lantern, see Mervyn Heard's Phantasmagoria: The Secret Life of the Magic Lantern.

<sup>127</sup> It is debatable whether a formulation such as "voiceful" would not be more appropriate here.

to play a little *tour de passe passe*, on a smaller scale than, for instance, Villiers's Hadaly.

If la Stilla and La Svengali are theatrical simulacra, submitting everything to analogy according to Baudrillard's model,<sup>128</sup> they also *speak* of analogy in its cybernetic incarnation. But rather than confuse the already uncertain contours of analogical reference, effectively drawing new lines in a sort of composite architectural draft that makes the initial markings difficult to distinguish, let us go back, for a moment, to mahogany glass cases, cabinets of curiosities and crystal palaces. Let's structure an argument out of glass, precisely because the material may be architecturally unsound. One of the more interesting properties of glass is its transparency, its ability to allow the outside in and the inside out. As such, these environments, separated by a what appears a fragile film, are juxtaposed in a way that allows the operations of one to coordinate with the operations of the other, if desired. Independence is possible, if difficult, when hyperaware of the neighbour's comings and goings, or more importantly when the neighbour is aware of ours. In any case, whether this case is a glass showcase, whether we are talking about a mental case, the organization of the interior space right down its secret nooks is more apparent when the boundaries are transparent, maybe even invisible to the naked eye (we've all walked into a glass door at some point). The crystallization of social processes and individual

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<sup>128</sup> In distinguishing the automaton from the robot, between first- and second-order simulacra, Baudrillard defines the automaton as a "theatrical, mechanical and clockwork counterfeit of man where the technique is to submit everything to *analogy* and to the simulacrum-effect. The other is dominated by a technical principle where the machine has the upper hand, and where, with the machine, *equivalence* is established" (*Symbolic Exchange and Death* 53). Villiers, for one, was clearly penning fantasies with dimensions that do not correspond to the ones laid out by Baudrillard.

behaviours becomes a fairly literal concept, with – at least visually and potentially vocally – permeable structures emerging from the seeming chaos of movement.

Technological apparatus, as a reflection of these operations, becomes an imperative.

There is another kind of glass, the kind that throws a reflection with perfectly mimetic abilities, which might be described as possessing a rather hysterical quality.<sup>129</sup> Mirrors have their own kind of transparent properties. Mirrors occasionally distort the reflected object while keeping their intrinsic properties intact. And of course, breaking mirrors has popularly been associated with seven years of bad luck.

“À ce moment, Rodolphe de Gortz se baisse, ramasse le couteau qui s’est échappé de la main de Franz, et il le dirige vers la Stilla immobile...

Franz se précipite sur lui, afin de détourner le coup qui menace la malheureuse folle...

Il est trop tard...le couteau la frappe au coeur...

Soudain, le bruit d’une glace qui se brise se fait entendre, et, avec les mille éclats de verre, dispersés à travers la salle, disparaît la Stilla...

Franz est demeuré inerte...Il ne comprend plus...Est-ce qu’il est devenu fou, lui aussi?” (Verne, Le Château des Carpathes 213)

Noiray reads the baron de Gortz’s destruction of la Stilla’s image as an act driven by a sort of suicidal rage (Le Romancier et la Machine 180). There is something in Verne’s passage and Noiray’s interpretation that recalls the oblique relationship between hypnotizer and hypnotized, between ventriloquist and puppet, between mad scientist, lover, and *andréide*. Essentially, it is the mirror image that speaks *of* the creator (and

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<sup>129</sup> For a historically rigorous revision of hysteria, including a discussion of the perfectly adaptable mimetic quality of the hysteric, see Sander Gilman et al. Hysteria Beyond Freud, particularly Part 1.

the creator here may be in equal parts Rodolphe de Gortz, Franz de Télék, and the ingenious, ignoble Orfanik) more than *to* the creator that drives him to the precipice of madness. Contrary to psychiatrist Hugh W. Diamond's mid-nineteenth-century belief that "he could cure at least some of his [mentally ill] patients by exposing them to photographs of themselves" (Gilman et al. 354), reflections here are harbingers of ruin (s). It is as though the soulful protean reflection carries the seed of contagion, and must necessarily be destroyed to force a transition from patient zero to ground zero. In the end, the *château des Carpathes* is reduced by an explosion to a "*masse de ruines fumantes*" (214).<sup>130</sup> One can imagine the immensity of such explosive sound and the ensuing silence, with perhaps only the faintest tinkling of broken glass still audible in the distance.

If the voice "gained a measure of immortality" (Sterne 1) the first time it spoke back at Edison from the depths of his phonograph, this eternal life was only so good as the cylinders on which it was inscribed, and on the apparatus that made it legible. If the idea of "soul" is a viable component to the fragile equation of human structural drafting, it can only be sustained as long as the materials remain intact, refuse to shatter, or, simply put, so long as the builder's luck holds out.

Before the floor plan can be determined, the solidity of the construction must be verified, or its ethereality confirmed, and this by identifying its material components.

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<sup>130</sup> A parallel worth noting here would be Ross Chambers's reading of Hadaly as an automaton missing the essential attribute of life (presumably the soul), reducing her to "*un trou*," as he puts it, "*avec de la 'femme' autour*," which as he points out leads to Ewald's anxiety-ridden question "*comment aimer zéro?*" (43). At Hadaly's spiritual core is the negative space of ground zero, ready for the erecting of fantastic/phantasmatic edifices.

Which leaves us wondering whether the properties inherent in any given system are not, in fact, properties in the sense of structures that we can claim ownership of, inhabit, remodel, or raze to the ground.

Finally, the fragile structure needs to be considered in terms of subtler negative space, interstitial spaces that are difficult to distinguish, let alone navigate. Or perhaps the opposite is true – is it easier to navigate freely when interior and exterior appear to cohabitate in what are effectively semi-detached (or semi-attached) relationships? Which is not to say they are less systematized, only perhaps more coordinated. In either case, just as we wonder how the human body can continue to function when confronted with its complex viscera, so does the very transparency with which any given structure's interior operations are put on display give it an uneasy air of tenuous solidity. The phantasmagorical illusion of the absence of boundaries, the seemingly complete annihilation of structure or the reduction of this structure to ruins or relics, speak, with the infernal white noise that must come from the convulsing of organs and the grinding of machines, of both shoddy construction and the spark of genius. Being unsound, the structure asks, in a reedy voice flecked with immortality, only to be redesigned and rebuilt, over and over again.

**Chapter Five:**  
**The Mechanisms of Ellipses and Noise in Marcel Schwob's "La Machine à parler"**  
**and selected *contes à appareils***

A reflection on mirrors: does the mirror image speak of spatial symmetry with the model who resides on the other side? It is worth imagining that conversation if so, and listening for the silence if not.

### **Fearful Symmetry**

According to Julien Schuh, the parallel relationship between the intimate and the collective, the singular and the general was named “Symétrie” by Marcel Schwob, scholarly auteur of the Parisian fin de siècle (114). Symmetry is “l’ordre caché de l’univers” (Schuh 114), and the soul of the universe, if we resurrect a passage from Verne, is electricity (Château des Carpathes 195). The vehicle of the soul, if we retrace our steps back toward to last chapter and carry them over to this one,<sup>131</sup> is arguably the voice, but vehicles (recalling Jarry) do not necessarily exceed super-human ability of covert and (recalling Villiers) fictional origin. Creating a composite, artificial portrait of some of the above ideas, we could say that symmetry shuffles electric traces of the voice along its central axe, which then splits like the spine of a book so that the individual *pneuma* can be interpreted. This sort of reflection I fear owes more to an unsuccessful attempt on my part to operate on both a critical and a poetic level, but on the other hand, I’m not convinced that oblique construction compromises a textual edifice’s overall solidity. Furthermore, this sort of self-reflexive hyper-self-consciousness ties in satisfactorily to the idea of autopoetics, at the foundation of this

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<sup>131</sup> Which we can justify because according to Agnès Lhermitte, “la voix chez Schwob” (I like keeping this bit of sentence, because it makes the voice sound like a visitor) is “à la fois véhicule de l’âme, *pneuma* individuel, et de la pensée immortelle” (15).



project in both the extensive and entertaining format developed by Ira Livingston and as an “obvious” but “helpful pun,” as pointed out by Mark McGurl (49), which was enough, in my opinion, to justify usurping a Blakeian formulation for this section heading. A *clin d’oeil* is never just a *clin d’oeil*, if we consider the importance of eyes in, for instance, Freud’s discussion of the uncanny via Hoffmann’s “Sandman.” Furthermore, an eye is not just a biological eye. Microscopes and cameras were just two of the devices that changed the scale of seeing in the nineteenth century. If we look back to Jarry’s *Surmâle*, even the *oeil-de-boeuf*, the peephole – not a technologically complex apparatus but its purpose, which is to funnel the human field of vision toward a specific focal point, allows us to convincingly consider it a sort of prosthesis through which the sexual exploits of the *Surmâle* and his sidekick are witnessed – channels the act of watching into a scientific evaluation, transforming seeing into recording. As Bathybius approaches the peephole with serious professional intent, a *positively* resplendent light floods his gaze:

La vitre ronde était obstruée, du côté du cabinet de toilette, observatoire du docteur, par deux volets, en bois plein, que commandait une crémone. Il s’avança à tâtons et tourna la poignée d’un geste ferme, avec la même précision qu’il eût, professionnellement, fait jouer la vis sans fin d’un spéculum. Les volets s’écartèrent sans bruit, ainsi que des ailes de papillon s’ouvrent. L’œil-de-boeuf s’illumina, du feu doré de toutes les lampes du hall, et ce fut comme un astre qui se serait levé dans le cabinet de toilette, sur l’horizon court de la table du docteur. (*Le Surmâle* 143)

This is where seeing and hearing get confounded in the general cacophony of sensual experience and empiric endeavor. An alternative use of the verb *voire* may be imagined, as in “to make use of one’s voice,” rather than simply “to see”: *voix-re*

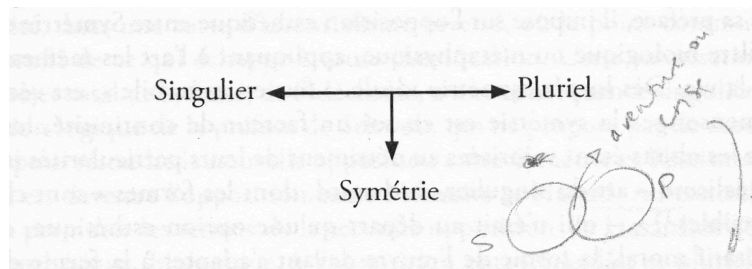
dissolves into *voire*. In this fantastical space, such phonetic and visual puns as *voie* and *voix* can also be usefully engaged to suggest that the physical traces of the voice<sup>132</sup> can be read like a road-map to the soul, bound on its immortal journey with a buoyant playlist and an extra (*pneumatic*) tire in the trunk in case it falls flat. *La voie/x est libre*. One can *voire* clearly now.

Without (spatially without, as opposed to within) the parameters of cybernetics, Marcel Schwob wrote, in the preface to his collection of stories entitled “Coeur double,” that “dans une seconde de vie intense nous revivons virtuellement et actuellement l’univers” (*Oeuvres* 43). The role of art is to give “au particulier l’illusion du général” (Schwob, *Oeuvres* 48). If “pour l’art le monde est discontinu et libre,” if “le domaine de l’art est la liberté” (Schwob, *Oeuvres* 49-50), again we must perceive that *la voie/x* onto which “l’homme qui part de son moi pour arriver aux autres” (Schwob, *Oeuvres* 47) merges at a breathtaking pace is distinctly *libre*, which is a relief at such high speeds. Without the parameter of cybernetic theory, but very much sounding like something from within, Schwob also wrote that the object of art consists of “les êtres vivants, spontanés, libres, dont la synthèse psychologique et physiologique, malgré certaines conditions déterminées, dépendra des séries qu’ils rencontreront, des milieux qu’ils traverseront,” adding that “ils ont des facultés de nutrition, d’absorption et d’assimilation” (50). The *bémol* is that we must “tenir

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<sup>132</sup> In her discussion of Villiers’s *L’Ève future*, Miller-Frank discusses Charles Cros’s “thinking of sense perception as mechanical” (145), adding that Villiers was evidently aware of Cros’s work to make physical traces of the voice, and responded to this conception of the materiality of the voice” (145). While this facet of Villiers’s text was not examined in great depth in Chapter One, it serves to draw *L’Ève future* into the undercurrent of my fifth chapter.

compte du jeu compliqué des lois naturelles et sociales, que nous appelons hasard,” which for the artist is “Hasard” with a capital H, which brings “l’organisme physique et conscient les choses dont il peut se nourrir, qu’il peut absorber et s’assimiler (50). It’s not that such enunciations are surprising. The excitement lies not in an artificial discovery of cybernetic theorizing in Schwob – although Schwob is as symmetrically close to the central axis that is the emergence of cybernetics as we are – but in how obligingly the above excerpts lend themselves to transposition into a cybernetic context, and juxtaposition to this sentence, for instance, lifted from N. Katharine Hayles’s brief history of the development of information theory: “Identifying information with *both* pattern and randomness proved to be a powerful paradox, leading to the realization that in some instances, an infusion of noise into a system can cause it to reorganize at a higher level of complexity” (Hayles, How We Became Posthuman 25). The *jeu compliqué* is at the foundation of a self-construction that relies on *hazardous* operations, and that therefore contains random noise at its nucleus. Schuh develops a simple linear diagram to describe the seemingly random collision of micro and macro *selon* Schwob , producing what he termed an “aventure” or a “crise,” resolved by symmetry as a form of synthesis (117). Below is a scan of his diagram with my own version of it pencilled in, filling in the forms of my argument over the last five chapters more precisely.



**Figure 1** Julien Schuh's diagram of Schwobian symmetry; my version as a Venn diagram

*Vive* the return of the Venn diagram and its central nucleus, the playground of unsustainable and possibly unsound ideas and operations, the crisis center for the singular and the plural, interior and exterior, the individual and the masses. There is something in this convergence that recalls Marshall McLuhan,<sup>133</sup> and Schuh's argument does suggest that Schwob's texts function very much intrinsically as a synthetic (speaking of both synthesis and artificiality) apparatus in its use of "différents dispositifs" such as symmetry and analogy to suggest a "cohérence supérieure" (Schuh 124). Let's remember that the rhetorical trope of analogy is at the core of cybernetic theory, and that it is "not merely an ornament of language but is a powerful conceptual mode that constitutes meaning through relation" (Hayles, How We Became Posthuman 91).

For Schwob, the *seconde de vie intense* that rescales the immense, the sublime and the universal so that it can adequately be reflected in the infinitely small must be demonstrated by showing the reader the two facets of the heart, its communicating

<sup>133</sup> I am thinking here of McLuhan's famous enunciation "the medium is the message." "This is merely to say that the personal and social consequences of any medium - that is, of any extension of ourselves - result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves, or by any new technology" (McLuhan 7). Such rescaling is embedded in Schwob's text, which functions as an apparatus.

cells, the *coeur double* made up of terror and pity,<sup>134</sup> the journey from one to the other, pendulum-like in its trajectory, reflecting the path of human history. The singular and the plural operate on either side of a central axis, doppelgängers in a system of fearful symmetry. Along this axis is a knot of anguish at the heart of which is noise noise noise noise.

Before we move onto **Blanche Noise**, I need to indulge

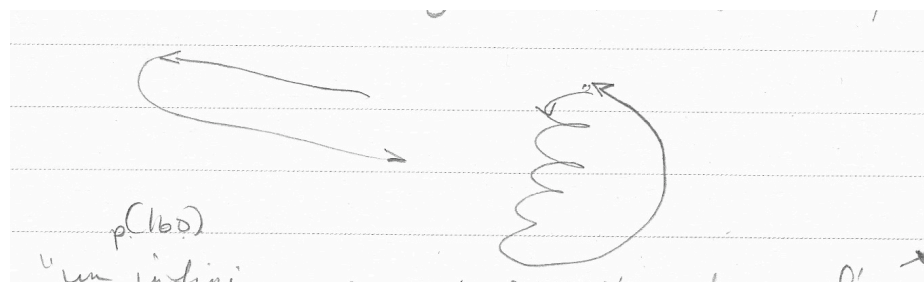
### **An Additional Digression On Geometry**

About Marcel Schwob, Remy de Gourmont had this to say in his collection of micro-monographs Le Livre des masques: “ Le génie particulier de M. Schwob est une sorte de simplicité effroyablement complexe” (157). This frightfully complex simplicity was, according to de Gourmont, manifested in the arrangement of an infinitude of small and precise details which give the overall impression of unity, and by a sort of structural geometry built into Schwob’s texts (157). Infinitely small details creating a singular subject or object is reminiscent of pointillisme, if one were to look for painterly correspondences (today we think of the photomosaics of ad campaigns and poster shops). Of course we have already talked about the symmetrical resolution

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<sup>134</sup> I am tempted to say the Jekyll and Hyde of the heart. Coeur double was dedicated to Robert Louis Stevenson whom Schwob greatly admired and befriended through correspondence (see Marcel Schwob’s entry on Robert Louis Stevenson in Spicilège (pp.95-115); see also Gauthier’s essay on Schwob and Stevenson “Le voyage vers Samoa,” and Jean-Marie Seillan’s essay “Marcel Schwob aux îles Samoa” in Marcel Schwob d’hier et d’aujourd’hui, pp.269-288; also interesting is a 1927 entry in the “Chronique des lettres françaises” on “Marcel Schwob et Stevenson,” ed. Joseph Place). Joëlle de Sermet points out the Aristotelian origins of these two sentiments, which Schwob considers the prototype of human emotions (259). However, in defining the precise meaning of Schwob’s terror, Sermet highlights a passage from Spicilège in which Schwob discusses the stupor of Dr. Jekyll who realizes, upon awakening, that his own hand has become the hairy hand of Hyde (alliteration unintentional) (260). This is not dissimilar to the idea of something that belongs to the house but that does not live there.

between singular and plural, although what is interesting is that in de Gourmont's observation, the plural starts from the small and builds the large which is the singular, point by point, or block by block. This too is a form of symmetry. My sketch of de Gourmont's assessment of the other geometrical strategies in Schwob's texts ended up looking like this:

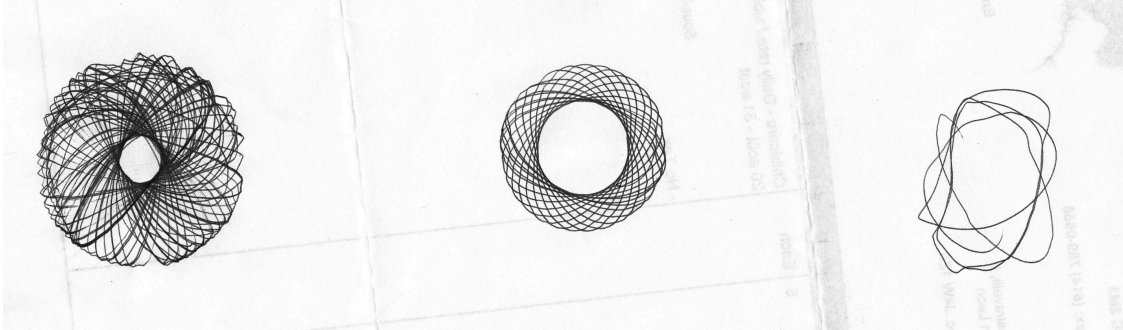


**Figure 2** Sketch of Remy de Gourmont's assessment of Schwobian geometrical strategy

I thought my doodles were pretty inconclusive, except that there is something pendular in the movement, which always returns to its origin, however fictive that point of departure may be. Pendular movement might suggest the swinging admonitory arm of the metronome. “No, no, no,” it seems to say with its wagging finger in tick-tock tones. “You must keep time.” It is ever so important to maintain regularity. We are kept in time by the rhythmic patterns of our biology, our dislocated psyches floating

adrift like so many hysterical wombs<sup>135</sup> on the salty, metrical waves of our inner-mechanisms, searching for something potable and for friendly ports of call.

But my “Gourmantian” doodle suggests both the pendular and the elliptical. Since we’re tearing a page out of school-day sketches, remember these?



**Figure 3** Elliptical textual strategy

The little instrument that helped me draw them came out of a Kinder egg. Tangled little elliptical nets, messy little webs that are always drawn back into their nucleus, as we can see by the heavier pen marks. On the far right was my first attempt. I’ve written that way sometimes – I think I’m doing it here.

It has been suggested that Schwob privileged the individual thread to the detriment of the web (Berg 10). I suspect that would look a little bit like my drawing on the far right. I don’t know that such conclusions ought to be drawn, however, or written for that matter.

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<sup>135</sup> In *Ventriloquized Bodies*, Janet Beizer defines the term *hysteria*, derived from the Greek *hysteria*, “uterus” as it was utilized in antiquity to describe a disease caused by “sexual continence: the abstemious uterus dried up, lost weight, and consequently was able to migrate in search of moisture.” (Beizer, *Ventriloquized Bodies*, 4) I find this image, and the implications of this image, particularly useful in discussing the disconnection between body and psyche, a theme that is represented in all three works to be discussed below, particularly as Beizer also discusses the appropriation of *hysteria* by Nineteenth-Century writers in terms of “identification of the writing self as Other” (Beizer, *Ventriloquized Bodies*, 8).

## Blanche Noise

White noise. Michel Serres hears it distinctly by the sea. Drawing our attention to the lost meaning of the French word “noise,” originally signifying “bruit, tapage et dispute,” Serres points out, rather ruefully, that English has borrowed “le bruit,” while the French have only retained “la fureur” (31).<sup>136</sup> “Noise” is of the same family as “nausea” and “nautical” (Serres 32), sharing a lovely affinity with the navigator at the helm of “cybernetics.” Vacuum cleaners, free-stand mixers, the quiet hum of electronics – this is white contemporary noise, and it calms babies with its presumably uterine-like monotony. We are rocked into submission by white noise, which is like listening to the grinding of the organs on our insides. The surface of our bodies, which is the space that intersects our innards with the outside, navigates (sometimes clumsily) our mysterious interiors around the visible environment. The surface of our bodies is an interstitial space, reverberating with sound that oscillates from inside to out and vice versa. Our bodies are perfectly built to integrate the surrounding chaos (Serres 42).

In Marcel Schwob’s book, the “espaces blancs” of the text, which I think it is most practical to translate here literally as “white spaces,” is the space in which the “vrai lecteur” builds almost as much as the author. “Celui qui ne sait pas lire dans le blanc des pages ne sera jamais bon gourmet de livres” (Schwob, *Oeuvres* 964). The

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<sup>136</sup> What amuses me personally is one of the character Marianne’s lines in Jacques Rivette’s 1991 film *La Belle Noiseuse*. She explains her knowledge of the meaning of the word “noise” by saying “J’ai vécu quatre ans au Québec quand j’étais petite et là-bas on disait “C’est une noiseuse, t’es rien qu’une noiseuse,” meaning troublemaker. I’ve never heard it said. Possibly there is confusion with the word “niaiseuse” (idiot) or more likely this scene is an illustration of the cliché that, according to the French, Quebec is the land of linguistic archaisms. The noiseuse in question, Marianne, is played by Emmanuelle Béart.



symmetrical relationship between white spaces and white noise – which through its very static monotony becomes almost an absence of noise, a loud silence, an un-sound – finds a further correspondence in the blank bodily surface. (I’m uncomfortable saying the white surface of the body, although I would like to, because my intention is not to associate white space with racially white bodies. Rather, I am considering white as the absence of colour, the chromatic equivalent of a ground zero blighted in the wake of destruction before reconstruction. Blank is a useful term, but it is in my opinion inaccurate in this context. The surface of Schwob’s body of work is not a *tabula rasa*, but rather a palimpsestic undertaking [I’m amused by considering this alongside the idea of Schwob as Undertaker]. Agnes Lhermitte has built a thorough argument around this idea, which we will come back to later).

If there is gastronomic pleasure to be had by building on white surfaces – the “gourmet de livres” being subject to the rhythmic demands of grinding organs, of bodily regeneration, of rewriting, rewiring, rebuilding – then negotiating, absorbing and regurgitating the surrounding sound and fury is a somewhat cannibalistic set of operations, I suppose. We are wandering a little aimlessly into Kristevan territory. If ground zero is the original surface, then that is where we might conceive “Ève noiseuse, mer, mère, matrice, utérus fabuleux” (Serres 51), and this is a recipe for a circular, autopoietic schema. Here is what Schwob had to say, ventriloquizing through an “observateur venu d’un autre monde,” about formulas for building on white surfaces:

Si la sensation humaine est comme le logarithme de l'excitation, le goût des globules blancs pour les proportions différentes des cultures ou des solutions qu'on leur présente varie dans la même mesure. Vos globules ont des individualités très fines, et il est possible d'en faire, grâce à votre belle faculté de l'habitude qui les mithridatise pour certains poisons, des automates bien semblables à ceux que votre Pascal voulait construire en donnant la foi aux êtres rationnels (Oeuvres 241).

Such homeopathic strategies were explored in the chapter on Jarry, and if we recall there too the effect was one of sclerosis.

“Vos actions sont soumises à un infini d’intermédiaires,” declares Schwob’s “visiteur supérieur,” who possesses “la vue bornée d’un artiste en même temps que la généralisation d’un savant” (Oeuvres 240-241). The observer from another world can conflate passion and dispassion from his peripheral perspective, which is more difficult within the nucleus, where the horizon is obstructed by the infinitude of intermediaries, the frenzied circulation of which creates the illusion of a single mass standing still in a swarm, multiple voices droning on in unintelligible confusion. “Pour un observateur venu d’un autre monde, mes embaumeuses et mes pirates, mon sauvage et mon roi n’auraient aucune variété,” concludes Schwob, in his own voice (I’d like to say *adoptant sa propre voix/e*). Any difference is perhaps only one of scale, which shifts depending on your perspective.

La belle noiseuse, borrowed by Michel Serres from Honoré de Balzac’s short story “Le Chef-d’oeuvre inconnu,” could very well become an epithet for “le multiple, et le tonitruant mélange, oui, le chaos” (Serres 45). For Serres, “la belle noiseuse est le géométral” (44). In my book, borrowing gleefully from Serres, the floor plan, the blueprint is multiple, chaotic, palimpsestic, illegible. It is a schoolbook elliptical

sketch drafted with an imperfect instrument. *Bruit de fond* is Blanche Noise, not so much a tale of origin as one of the irrepressible desire to redraft and rebuild with the sort of flimsy, plastic apparatus that inevitably leads to exceeding the lines of the perfectly formed, creating little pockets where the infinite intermediaries can amalgamate loudly.

Recalling the “self-contained and totemistic value” (Auerbach 284) of Trilby’s foot, it came as no surprise to me that in Balzac’s story, the one part of the model that is discernible amidst the painterly *fouillis* is her foot, nor that the painting’s observers stand before it in a state of sclerosis:

En s’approchant, ils aperçurent dans un coin de la toile le bout d’un pied nu qui sortait de ce chaos de couleurs, de tons, de nuances indécises, espèce de brouillard sans forme ; mais un pied délicieux, un pied vivant ! Ils restèrent pétrifiés d’admiration devant ce fragment échappé à une incroyable, à une lente et progressive destruction (Balzac 305).

For the interstitial builders, the *bons gourmets* who inadvertently uncover the fragment that pulled away from its entropic trajectory in scouting out the ground zeros, it’s nice that the foot is “délicieux.” The relic buried beneath white noise is like the intelligible utterance amidst acoustic debris.

A little under two decades before Balzac published his short story, English physicist William Hyde Wollaston speculated on realms of sound, parallels universes “beyond the parameters of known vibration” (Emmett 471). The possibility of magnifying these inaudible frequencies into perceptibility finds its explicit literary expression in obscure author Florence McLandburgh’s short-story “The Automaton-Ear” (1873), which as James Emmett points out, indirectly associates such theories

with a “black wave of insanity” (470), bringing us back abruptly to the unsound. In the story, a university professor speculates on the persistence of sound and creates an instrument that augments human hearing in order to channel this inaudible debris. The first attempt magnifies all this background silence into a chaotic “noise like the heavy rumble of thunder” (713). Improving the instrument, the professor succeeds in tapping into particular periods of sound with, as Emmett observes, “archaeological precision” (472). As the acoustic ruins of the past are resurrected into relics, the professor develops a disproportionate fascination for his instrument. “I had grown to love it,” he confides, “not alone as a piece of mechanism for the transmission of sound, but like a *living* thing” (719). This last sentence could convincingly have been included in a chapter of Villiers’s L’Ève Future. The professor’s love affair with his apparatus is such that he loses interest in the immediate environment, much in the way Lord Ewald becomes possessive of and possessed by Hadaly, dwindling into extinction with the loss of his *andréide*. In one particular passage of McLandburgh’s story, the professor attends the opera in London, but as the prima donna, the voice “before which the world has bowed” makes her appearance, he finds himself listening restlessly and disconsolately to her performance.

Malibran’s song stood out in my memory clearly defined and complete, like a magnificent cathedral of pure marble, with faultless arches and skillfully chiseled carvings, where the minarets rose from wreaths of lilies and vine leaves cut in bas-relief, and the slender spire shot high, glittering yellow in the upper sunlight, its golden arrow, burning like flame, pointing towards the East. But this prima donna built only a flat, clumsy structure of wood ornamented by gaudily painted lattice (715).

Hyperbolic formulation and all, the passage is very much reminiscent of Svengali's appraisal of Trilby's vocal capacity, detailing her anatomy in lines of architectural analogy. In McLandburgh's text, sound is the edifice, whether glorious, or cheap and wretched, built with anatomical tools. In Du Maurier's, the tools are the edifice. A cross-breeding of the two would reveal that both tools and edifice are imperfect unless somehow augmented. But dabbling with the plasticity of augmentation always carries an element of risk. After jealously guarding his instrument so that he may revel "in another world" while the general public remains "deaf forever" (715), the professor stands "petrified" before his mirror, no longer recognizing his reflection. These nineteenth-century texts which may arguably be qualified as *contes à appareils*, whether or not the *appareil* is a technological one or a mesmeric strategy, seem to echo each other with a common admonition: attempting to capture what should remain unattainable is an alienating and distinctly unsound decision. When the relic is drawn out of the chaos and made intelligible, the one who instigates this archaeological dig will be drawn down into the dust. Except that once the dust settles, the rebuilding can start again, which drafts a whole new tale of origin. It is human "nature" to want to engage in covert operations, and as Michel Serres says "la nature" is "toujours en train de naître" (45). The name of this new tale is Blanche Noise, and it might begin a little bit like this passage, lifted from Marchel Schwob's short-story "La Machine à parler":

AU COM-MEN-CE-MENT FUT LE VER-BE,  
hurla la machine (301).

Schwob's story appeared in the Echo de Paris in 1891, and was published as part of the collection of tales Le Roi au masque d'or in 1892. The "commencement" according to Schwob, of distinctly mythological proportions,<sup>137</sup> can perhaps best be summarized by an excerpt from the preface to his collection. "Concevez que Dieu parle: alors l'univers est son langage," he writes. "Comme les masques sont le signe qu'il y a des visages, les mots sont le signe qu'il y a des choses. Et ces choses sont des signes de l'incompréhensible" (242). Removed (once? twice?) from the locus of unintelligibility, words are not made any more distinct but rather add to the overcrowded utterances that surely produce a sound like white noise. Interestingly, Sermet finds the "signe distinctif" of Schwob's texts in "la plasticité d'une voix insaisissable, parfois plurielle et toujours attachée à contrefaire, à pasticher" (264-265). This multiple, plastic voice is what Agnès Lhermitte, using the work of Gérard Genette as the scaffolding for her study of Schwob, qualifies as palimpsestic. Sermet's use of the word "distinctif" is a reference to the specific property of Schwob's work. Nevertheless, distinction is difficult to achieve in the midst of a crowd, and the multiple is unquestionably a crowded space. This was the basis of Jules Renard criticism of Schwob. Initially sharing a great friendship with Schwob and lavishing praise on his intellect and his work, Renard eventually began to confide a secret and gangrenous dislike of his former friend to his journal, describing him as simply an

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<sup>137</sup> The most comprehensive study of Schwob's literary influences, the hypotexts that feed his writing - including classical, biblical, mythological, fabulous, symbolist and many in between - is Agnès Lhermitte's Palimpseste et merveilleux dans l'oeuvre de Marcel Schwob.

imitator (Fabre 57).<sup>138</sup> Schwob's work presumably held nothing distinctive for Renard – at the height of his acerbic commentary – but was rather an amalgamation of borrowed material, with textual strategies also recycled, most obviously perhaps from Edgar Allan Poe, whose body of work Schwob was familiar with and admired.<sup>139</sup> Today we'd be tempted to praise this sort of practice for its sustainability.<sup>140</sup>

For Lhermitte, Schwob's "travail de réécriture multiplie (...) ce jeu de miroirs littéraire" (13), the palimpsestic or, more literally, the hypertextual according to Genette, is relevant to Schwob specifically in that it is a reflexive model which transforms or imitates textual antecedents (Lhermitte 14). One possible *voie* (/x à emprunter) is that new life is breathed into a text (Lhermitte 14); a different trajectory leads not to the reproduction of an original, but rather to the production of a fake (Lhermitte 27).<sup>141</sup> If we look to Villiers for some conceptual symmetry, Hadaly is not a reproduction of an original but a *machine à fabriquer l'idéal*, relegating Alicia to the

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<sup>138</sup> For excerpts of Renard's journal, and to trace the evolution from friendship to hate, see Berg and Vadé Marcel Schwob d'hier et d'aujourd'hui and Fabre "Au coeur de la vie littéraire: Marcel Schwob vu par ses contemporains." "La Machine à parler" was dedicated to Renard, during more amicable times.

<sup>139</sup> Poe's influence on Schwob has been documented in many studies, contemporary to both Schwob and us. As one reviewer wrote a couple of decades after Schwob's death in an essay on Poe's influence on French authors, "L'oeuvre d'Edgar Poe a captivé Marcel Schwob. Il y admirait les plus sagaces principes de la composition du conte" (37). Even more immediately relevant, Schwob's great friend and biographer Pierre Champion commented that "Marcel Schwob a grandi sous le signe d'Edgar Poe." Poe's "Philosophy of Composition," as well as his fictional oeuvre, had been translated by another of his great admirers, Baudelaire, and while Schwob, a translator himself, could have accessed the original, Baudelaire's translations certainly helped familiarize French literary circles with his body of work. For Baudelaire's complete translations of Poe, including notes highlighting some their strange inadequacies, see the 1989 edition, edited by Claude Richard. Schwob's translations from English include works by Shakespeare, Defoe, de Quincy, and Wilde, amongst others. Opinions on the subjectivity of Schwob's translations vary; see for instance Trembley (11-13) and LHermitte (28-36).

<sup>140</sup> Schuerewegen makes a rather wry comment about the sort of intertextual practice of, amongst others, Verne and Schwob (specifically Le Château des Carpathes and "La Machine à parler") which is fitting here. "Vous voulez innover?," he asks. "Recyclez plutôt!" (124).

<sup>141</sup> This last literary strategy is specifically a property of the pastiche, according to Lhermitte (27).

status of an inferior, counterfeit copy of the *andréide*. Never mind which came first chronologically – chronology is of little, if any, importance. Up or down, if we recall, it’s all the same. The sort of literature that lifts the anchor and successfully navigates its hypertext is what Deleuze and Guattari call “Nomadology,” and, according to them, Marcel Schwob is successfully nomadic, multiplying “les récits comme autant de plateaux aux dimensions variables” (12). Again, important variables in navigating within and without the system seem to be scale and perspective, which determine the fluctuating proportions of the surrounding spaces between which we travel back and forth, *en empruntant la même* or a different *voi...e/x*. If new life is breathed into a reflexively appropriated set of texts, multiplied to the point of indistinguishability, the effect might be similar to that of every cinematic adaptation or parody of Frankenstein that had the doctor exclaim in the wild tones of an unsound mind “IT’S ALIIIVE!”<sup>142</sup> (Mwa ha ha). Alternatively, a new body of work might emerge, rendered structurally complex by the conglomeration of multiple textual layers and levels, rife with secret nooks and crannies (crooks and nannies). That is if it isn’t submerged by the sirens of the past, which are a danger for intrepid navigators. In which case, the body of work would sink to new uterine depths, rocked by the soothing white noise of oblivion, until systematically awakened from its soporific torpor. We might call it a story of Blanche Noise.

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<sup>142</sup> I hardly think I need to provide a reference here, but clips of the 1931 film Frankenstein with Colin Clive can be viewed on YouTube, including the famous scene where the monster is brought to life by “one man, crazy” in front of “three very sane spectators.” Clips of Mel Brooks’s parodic version Young Frankenstein starring with Gene Wilder (which is a personal favorite) can also be viewed on YouTube.



### **Inappropriate(d) Terminology**

At this point it seems appropriate to reference the term “architexture.” Indeed, I don’t think I could have gotten away without mentioning it. In his Introduction à l’architexte, Gérard Genette identifies the architext as that which is “omniprésent, au-dessus, au-dessous, autour du texte, qui ne tisse sa toile qu’en l’accrochant, ici et là, à ce réseau d’architexture” (Introduction à l’architexte 89). While I appreciate the infinite dimensionality of such a complex system of reference, which enables infinite self-reflexive operations, what this means in concrete terms is that the “architext” may be summed up in the word “novel,” for instance, casually appended to the cover of a work, generally beneath its title. This is not exactly – or even inexactly – the usage I would have imagined for the term “architexture” had I been first in line to usurp this useful pun (usurping being an activity for which I have clearly demonstrated a predilection). However, Genette’s further elaboration in Palimpsestes: la littérature au second degré, which if anything is the richest source of building materials for the current discussion, of the relationship between text and architext as a “relation tout à fait muette, que n’articule, au plus, qu’une mention paratextuelle de pure appartenance taxonomique” (Palimpsestes 16) draws a solid bridge, from my perspective, between Genette’s theories and the unsound quality of constructing categorical edifices, a feat (feet/foot) of theoretical engineering that has some Foucauldian resonance. An amusing footnote in Genette’s work points to the fact that the formulation “architexture” had been previously used by Mary Ann Caws in a completely different way which Genette admits escapes him entirely (89). Caws’s use of the term dispenses

with the sort of *millefeuille* layering that builds plateaux of referentiality, or buries them deep into the ground for archeological excavation. Rather, her use of “architexture” involves a material selection and a play of surfaces. I could easily Frenchify this and paint on a layer of meaning by translating it half-literally, half-liberally as *un jeu superficiel*, reminiscent of Lhermitte’s “jeu de miroirs littéraire” in reference to palimpsestic writing (13). Caws identifies the site of architextuality along the surface of more visible (infra)structures like “connecting passages, bridges, or corridors” (xiv) the use of which did not escape me at all, buried as I am in my own context. “‘Architexture’,” she explains, “is meant quite simply to call attention to the surface texture of the construction made by reading” (xiv). Applying this concept to Schwob, architexture would be practiced in the white spaces between concrete vocalizations. “As architecture involves etymologically both the concept of origin and that of the building process,” she adds, “architexture would involve both construction and material texture, would concentrate upon their interplay” (xiv). While I’ve taken the idea of origin and building processes and run with them (madly off in all directions), particularly in light of their relationship to materiality, Caws’s use of the term is very much entrenched, however, in textual expressions of construction, edifices that graze the surface of the page, even if they are throwing back a reflection of other edifices or methods of construction. In a sense, it seems to me that this is what Genette is getting at as well, so that what really escapes me is why Caws’s interpretation of architextuality escapes him. In any case, my own work doesn’t fit neatly into either paradigm, and I don’t think reinterpreting the term or forcing it to perform a unique set

of theoretical operations would have been useful here. I rather think it would have gotten diluted, in going overboard.

What I like best about Genette's Introduction à l'architexte is actually his diagram of genres, which looks distinctly to me like a cogwheel<sup>143</sup> escaped from some greater

### **Fandangled Apparatus**

As we have already seen, the late nineteenth century was a prodigious time for the invention of fictional apparatus, designed to reflect both the wonder and derision occasioned by the brisk pace of technological advance. Below is a small catalogue of the apparatus and devices explicitly labelled as such, amassed and displayed much in the way Edison reveals Evelyn Habal's disorderly accoutrements in L'Ève future:

- la machine à gloire (Villiers, Contes cruels)
- la machine-à-inspirer-l'amour (Jarry, Le Surmâle),
- l'appareil pour l'analyse chimique du dernier soupir (Villiers, Contes cruels);
- la machine à fouailler donnant une bonne éducation (Jarry, La revue blanche) ;
- la machine à changer le caractère des femmes (Cros)
- la machine à parler (Schwob)

These handy little instruments for social commentary share a common thread in that they are briefly presented and then quickly extinguished (neatly done in the small,

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<sup>143</sup> I'd also be tempted to compare it to Iron Man's chest repulsor transmitter, as seen in the film adaptations starring Robert Downey Jr. Comic book geekery, or interesting comparison with a powerful weapon embedded in an exoskeleton that augments human capacities exponentially? I suspect some enthusiastic hyperbolics on my part here (possibly in a mathematical sense).

swift space of the short story). There is a single-mindedness to the rather acerbic use of these devices in their respective texts that removes them from the immediate environment of more nuanced machines like the *andréide* of L'Ève future, for instance, or even the *Machine-à-inspirer-l'amour* of Le Surmâle, although many common elements arguably make up their design and these overlapping lines are difficult to isolate and draft cleanly.

Before getting into the specifics of each of these devices, it should be noted there are no easy substitutions in transitioning from such terms as apparatus, device, machine and instrument. Interchangeability of terminology is partially a reflection of the texts discussed. In Villiers's story "La Machine à gloire," the Machine in question is also referred to as the "Appareil-Bottom," capitalized in both instances. "Machine" appears both capitalized and not, capitalized when it is a specific Machine, and not when used generically, as in "l'Esprit du siècle, ne l'oublions pas, est aux machines" (Villiers, Contes cruels 71). "Mécanisme sublime" is also utilized as though substituting the parts for the whole (60). Jarry's machines and apparatuses vacillate between lower and upper case, another instance of slippery scale. In Schwob's text, the machine is tellingly capitalized when it is about to speak (more possessively put, when it will *prendre la parole*) with divine resonance: "La Machine va dire: J'AI CRÉÉ LE VERBE" (Schwob, Oeuvres 301). Furthermore, search engines yield such synonyms for *appareil* as *dispositif*, *moyen*, *engin*, *équipement*, *instrument*, *machine*,

further compounding the confusion.<sup>144</sup> My own understanding of the word *apparatus* is informed by Foucault and Agamben,<sup>145</sup> undeniably, and is therefore profoundly anchored in the institutional and the strategically hegemonic, but it also owes something to the chaotic comings and goings of the immense body of work operating in the overarching, bloated system of technological terminology (or is that the other way around?). The term should therefore be understood in this context as carrying layers of meaning which are difficult to separate, creating the sort of unintelligibility of an exercise like composite portraiture, and the reflexivity of palimpsestic writing, which operates like the infinite mirror mazes erected along desolate, sea-battered piers. If we recall, this is where *noise* is at its most profoundly enveloping.

Considering the relationship of fin-de-siècle *contes à appareils* to the greater body of work in (/on) which they operate, Christian Congiu's contemplation on the short story genre struck the right chords. "La nouvelle," he writes, "est un miroir que l'on promène le long d'un chemin, mais ce miroir est brisé: le nouvelliste va jouer avec les éclats, les éclaboussures, sans chercher à les fondre en un seul récit, sans prétendre

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<sup>144</sup> *Appareil* is also used in professional baking (and cooking), and refers to the mix of ingredients that make up the base of the recipe. That led to some confusion the first time I was told to "pétrir l'appareil." I spent several minutes appraising my KitchenAid stand mixer skeptically.

<sup>145</sup> It is also informed by Maria Tortajada and François Albera's recent efforts to extricate the term *apparatus* from the French *dispositif* by suggesting a new term, "dispositive," which accounts for the complex relationships between various media, rather than the operations of a specific machine, and dispenses with linear notions of origin. My own understanding of the term *apparatus*, however, does acknowledge the complex technological system in which it operates, refusing to assign a specific and static origin. I am therefore sitting on the fence with the term "dispositive," anxious to use it, in every sense of the word.

à une harmonie (qtd. in Vibert 581).<sup>146</sup> Most appealing in this formulation is the intersection of mirrors and sound (guided along a *voie/x*) in an image that recalls the shattering of la Stilla's projection in Le Château des Carpathes. Drafting a short story is a dissonant, fragmented, even vaguely dangerous undertaking. For Schwob, trouble is spelled VER-BE VER-BE VER-BE, exploding out of the *machine à parler* with a "déchirement extraordinaire," echoing in the alarming crackling of cogs and cables (Oeuvres 302). Machine malfunction is a common risk, but is on a 1:1 scale with the machine that operates the way it was designed to – the results are as unpredictable. I think we can here consider the specifically fin-de-siècle short text a sort of fandangled little apparatus with specific design features,<sup>147</sup> working more or less properly, the reading and writing of which is not without its hazards.

But what do all these Machines within machines do, and can we transition smoothly from upper to lower case, larger to smaller scale, and across terminology? Is the text scaled up from the proportions of the technical apparatus at its nucleus, or rather is the text the smaller version of nineteenth-century technomania, a *maladie du siècle* that presents a range of symptoms scattered between dread and exhilaration (a complicated case conducive to the practice of diagnostic quackery). The mechanics of the various apparatus, which should perhaps be detailed first, run the gamut from absurdly simple to gratuitously complex, with a generous supply of perversion.

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<sup>146</sup> Christian Congiu's evocative definition of *la nouvelle* may have been published in the Twentieth-Century, but Bertrand Vibert argues in his essay on Villiers that it fully applies ("s'applique déjà pleinement") to his *Contes cruels* and to following Nineteenth-Century short-story collections, adding that the genre no longer needed defending in the wake of Edgar Allan Poe (581).

<sup>147</sup> We could take, for example, some features and techniques detailed by Poe in his "Philosophy of Composition," coupled with the ornate, verbose texture of fin-de-siècle prose as a starting point.

Charles Cros's *machine à changer le caractère des femmes*, from his short eponymous piece performed in 1875 at Nina de Villard's<sup>148</sup> salon, for instance, is quite simply a contraption which cantankerous women enter, drink a glass of Champagne *cul sec* and reemerge much more pleasantly disposed.<sup>149</sup> Cros's fictional machine, designed "for every husband's pleasure" (Cros qtd in Mikkonen 28), finds a counterpart with a slightly more complex *modus operandi* in Jarry's short article "Battre les femmes" (1902), published in the periodical La Revue blanche. This sardonic little entry describes an "appareil pédagogique" called the "castigateur orthomatique," or "machine à fouailler donnant une bonne éducation" which consists of a chair to which the delinquent is strapped and spanked (the intensity of which can be regulated), while being made to listen to "des maximes morales, reproches, exhortations, etc." administered by one of Edison's, phonographs" (304), confirming Picker's observation, if we recall from discussion in Chapter Four, that the voice of science is in fact "the quiet, repressive drone of the mechanism of social convention" (129), setting Jarry's story up to be viewed with some Foucauldian perspective. Ideal for keeping naughty schoolboys in line, this apparatus is not limited to beating women, although conjugal dispute is the *point saillant* of the article, which leads to a discussion of the merits of purchasing a rubber woman moulded in the likeness of la "personne aimée" (for an extra thousand francs) to use as a punching bag, which provides an excellent physical

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<sup>148</sup> Nina de Villard was an author, Cros's lover, and the model for Édouard Manet's 1873 painting *La dame aux éventails*.

<sup>149</sup> See Miller-Frank 147 and Mikkonen 28 for further discussion of Cros's piece including, in the case of Miller-Frank, the influence it might have had on Villiers's L'Ève future.

workout. “Les aimables personnes dont nous parlons ne diffèrent en rien des femmes véritables,” we are told reassuringly. The rubber may lose its elasticity and “die” after three years, but “il y a tant de femmes “naturelles” qui doivent se réparer tous les jours!” The suggestion is to extend the lifespan of both by storing them in a cool place, like “une bonne cave” (305) – a handy tip with Bluebeard-like undertones.<sup>150</sup>

Elements of Jarry’s article may bare a flash-in-the-pan resemblance to Villiers’s *L’Ève future*, but the tone can be more harmoniously compared to the *contes cruels* which involve some kind of nonsensical apparatus. Designed as a sort of false advertisement for an outrageous new contraption, Jarry’s text is a concrete and straightforward example of pastiche the way Lhermitte defines it (or more appropriately, *à la façon dont Lhermitte l’entend*), the goal of which is not the reproduction of an original, but the fabrication of a fake (27).

Privileging the fake over related concepts – most obviously artificiality – is a strategy which also applies to Villiers’s short-story “L’appareil pour l’analyse chimique du dernier soupir,” which consists of an apparatus designed to quantify life (by capturing breaths) in order to then compare it empirically to death (expiring vs expiring), thus reducing outpourings of grief through the positivist approach of rational analysis. More explicitly, the idea of pastiche can be applied to Villiers’s most notorious *conte à appareil* “La Machine à Gloire.” Dispensing with fallible human *claqueurs* in order to embrace the reliability of pure mechanism, the machine in

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<sup>150</sup> Marcel Schwob, who revisits many fairy tales in *Le Livre de Monelle*, transposes Bluebeard into a story called “La Voluptueuse” in which a rather timid boy and a girl with masochistic predilections engage in some pretend play (see *Ouvres complètes* 413-415).



question is a theatrical space equipped with mechanical clapping hands and stomping feet, phonographs which mimic the sounds (“Cris,” “Rires,” “Sanglots” etc) of public appreciation, laughing gas, tear gas, and even Edison’s *andréides*<sup>151</sup> moonlighting as enraptured spectators when their human counterparts are indisposed, *le tout* designed to ensure the critical success of even the most mediocre of performances. All this elaborate, ironic, superfluous machinery is in fact a machine à canned laughter, with the last crucial mechanism, namely the spectator (Sabot 10), being set in motion during the performance. The *machine à gloire*, which renders such intangibles as public appreciation predictable, is more explicitly an apparatus for exposing the counterfeit qualities of success, glory and acclaim by revealing and manipulating the very regulated system of popular opinion. “Toute gloire a sa claque, c’est-à-dire son *ombre*, son côté de supercherie, de mécanisme et de néant (car le Néant est l’origine de toutes choses),” we are told (64). The superlative is mechanical achievement built with a phoney construction permit on the space that is neither positive nor negative but simply zero, and which sits at the foundation of the exaggerated structures of social conception and reception. If this point of view seems excessively sardonic, we may recall that Villiers himself did not benefit from popular success during his career.

What is compelling about the counterfeit as it is depicted in Villiers’s text is that it is a particularly noisy strategy on the one hand, saturated as it is with the constructed sounds of artificial adulation, but that this noise is equated with total lack, with the

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<sup>151</sup> “La Machine à Gloire” was published in the *Revue littéraire et artistique* in March of 1874, providing further evidence of Villiers long relationship with the idea of the perfectable automaton. In this story, the *andréide* is merely one out of a group of twenty or so “electro-human” automatons (72) scattered around the theatre and nestled in amidst the (human) spectators, filling in, as it were, the blank spaces.

void at the (false) origin of all things on the other. Noise that reaches the sort of intensity that it crosses the threshold of silence may be qualified as blindingly, deafeningly white.

### **Muttering, Sputtering, Bellowing: What it Means to Speak in Schwob's "La Machine à parler"**

For Schuerewegen, the tumultuous sound which has increasingly enveloped us with the development of telecommunication technology is evidence of the ghost in the machine (20). The dialogue between Schuerewegen and Serres can be detected in Schwob, somewhat like when a voice from a crossing wire intrudes and suddenly becomes part of the phone call, something which does not belong but temporarily resides there. Through the static, the white noise, texts speak to each other, and we listen in on the conversation.

Voices: resonant, disquieting, earth-shattering. In "La Machine à parler," the vibrations of the voice can hurtle through space and level universes – level them to ground zero, to the void that precedes new origins and the amoebic growth of their surrounding myths. Abusing of the voice, and its discursive counterpart speech, leads to chaos – not to the enveloping, amniotic chaos of *noise* but to the chaos of vocal extinction. The voice will shatter and die out spectacularly, when it bellows from the depths of pure mechanism. Pure mechanism: uncanny, enormous, rebellious and distinctly unsound in Schwob. The chaos is one of worlds unravelling noisily, explosively – it is the chaos of trains and automobiles, of factories, of things that speak

for humans and for a god who is *dorénavant* spoken for. The chaos of unpredictable new systems that are built from the stirring relics of extinct operations, that are born from the “bords labiaux enflés et noirs” (Schwob, *Oeuvres* 300) of progress, spawn of technological prowess.

Schuerewegen reads the *machine à parler*’s stilted, explosive speech as vocal ejaculations, therefore combining ideas of enunciation and creation in a single breath (26), or in the case of Schwob’s text, several laborious breaths. The act of creation – creation by the machine that has usurped its creator in the tradition of monsters gone awry – becomes, in Schuerewegen’s interpretation, a distinctly masculine and sexual initiative which in his opinion unlocks an understanding of Schwobian intertextuality (26). My own reading of Schwob’s text, however, finds it difficult to resist associating the machine’s “gorge géante, distendue et givelée, avec des replis de peau noire qui pendaient et se gonflaient” and its “deux lèvres énormes qui tremblaient au-dessus” (*Oeuvres* 300) with a more evidently female genitalia, and by further association, with nineteenth-century medical illustrations of the larynx. The “lèvres monstrueuses” also recall the “*vagina dentata* which turn-of-the-century men feared” might be concealed beneath women’s skirts (Dijkstra 294). As such, the machine’s mechanisms literally speak of a pathological, rotting sexuality, as monstrosly sublime in sound and scale as Trilby’s vocal apparatus, and as unpredictable. At the origin is the deliquescent, sordid spectacle of mechanical putrefaction, unexpected, contradictory, degenerative – an edifice rotting from within and erected on unsound, festering foundations. Furthermore, the decomposing, deliquescent machine supplants

the navigable, intelligible rooms of the integral, vigorous, healthy human mind, contaminating both man and machine with the diseased echo of some grotesque myth of origin, bellowed blasphemously from the depths of oblivion until all voices have been extinguished.

As Jarry's *Surmâle*, the *machine à parler* combines mechanical components with animal traits. The machine insidiously erases distinctions between mechanical and biological. As in Villiers's *L'Ève future*, the *machine* is animated by a fragile figure. A "petite femme maigre, contrefaite et nerveuse," we are told, is "l'âme qui fait mouvoir le clavier" of the machine (*Oeuvres* 301), and she is admirably well trained by the "Edison" of Schwob's story, whose name is never revealed, as though the specifics of identity become irrelevant in the process of taking a wrecking ball to divine hierarchies. Entities fragile in mind and body are the first to succumb to the lure of the artificial. Fin-de-siècle texts are thus replete with feeble figures in decadent states, with beings on the verge of shattering into nothingness and who paradoxically seem to hover over the infinite in their insubstantiality. There is a quality to the infinite that makes it invisible to the naked eye, but that is perhaps accessible when the eye is augmented by the appropriate prosthesis, and aligned with the relevant formulas.

We may also wonder whether the infinite is not a white space, a vast expanse so saturated with *noise* as to generate the dissonant foundation of a crisis of origin. Humanity seems to be built on such a tiny, exhaustible scale compared to the tireless execution with which the mechanical seemingly constructs itself.

In “La Machine à parler,” everything is levelled, including the machine’s monstrous mechanical voice, because “la nuance appartient à l’âme” (Schwob, *Oeuvres* 301) and so any evidence of human presence must flatline. The new mechanics must be a testament to a new mechanical era. “Voici la vérité et la nouvelle parole,” states the machine’s creator, his own voice eroded into an unsteady collection of outbursts and quaverings, as though his *machine* had sucked the sound out of him, vampirically.<sup>152</sup>

Inevitably, just as the *Surmâle* dies in a high voltage embrace, Hadaly is destroyed in a fire, Trilby dissolves into La Svengali for a final performance from beyond the grave and La Stilla’s technological afterlife is shattered into glittering fragments, so must *la machine à parler* expire spectacularly. In “un déchirement extraordinaire, un craquement de rouges, un affaissement de la gorge, un flétrissement universel des cuirs, une fusée d’air qui emporta les touches syllabiques en débris,” the machine implodes, rebelling against its creator, refusing to bend to his blasphemous operations, and takes with it its master’s voice. The machine’s inventor is left like many a literary scientist whose protean plans go horrifically wrong – starkly unsound amidst a terrible *noise*. In the end, there is no divine conception of the machine from

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<sup>152</sup> Some of the elements in “La Machine à parler” had been explored in an earlier story published by Schwob in the *Echo de Paris* in 1890 entitled “Béatrice.” In this story, a dying woman seeks to transfer her soul into the body of her lover with her dying breath, because “l’âme de l’amante veut habiter le beau corps de celui qu’elle aime” (*Oeuvres* 105), much as one inhabits a house. The transfusion having taken place, the lover is horrified to find himself in possession, not only of Béatrice’s soul, but of her voice. The lover then wonders at his surprise, chiding himself for not having guessed at this outcome, “car la voix n’est autre chose que le mouvement des molécules de l’air sous l’impulsion d’une âme” (107).

without the parameters of man, only the echo of one through the other, until all distinctions dissolve into the white spaces of silence.

In the few, highly charged pages of “La Machine à parler,” Schwob creates a palimpsestic portrait of the *dispositif complexe* of fin-de-siècle fantasies that nervously explore mechanical substitutions for human agency, humanity’s impending extinction into the phantasmatic, and ghosts dissolving within machines by *emprunt* (literally “borrowing”) a *voie/x* that is well-travelled, *dégagée*, clearly defined, but somehow still unfamiliar, as though the map of its labyrinthian sinuousness had vanished and needed redrafting at every passage. Navigating confounding intersections and tight spaces within immeasurable vastness successfully forms the sinew of a greater literary system.

After the sustained operations of fin-de-siècle literary devices, one might wonder what the chances are of avoiding repetitive strain injury, particular in the more depleted, articulate areas. How can a single voice operate symmetrically but remain distinct and intact? The answer, I think, is related to adjustments in scale – in sound and space – both of which are difficult to define, but neither of which should be contained, and to the exploitation of the available technologies. When a compelling utterance is augmented by adapted apparatus, when small sound is allowed to exceed the parameters of its natural space, an irregular path is carved through the annals of literary systems creating relationships which are reciprocal and analogous rather than chronological or hierarchical. Texts speak to each other elliptically, in white spaces.

Marcel Schwob, it seemed, had a particularly evocative speaking voice.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Rachilde wrote of Schwob that “parmi les conteurs de notre temps” he was the only one “qui sache mettre en valeur les mots sonores d’une belle page!” (*Review of les Vies Imaginaires* 349). In an article on Schwob’s *Coeur double*, which Jules Renard writes in the form of an encounter between the author and a first-person narrator, Renard describes Schwob’s voice alternatively as “une sonnerie de clochette” adding that he sometimes saw the voice instead of hearing it (107), as having “le doux son des choses qui sont près de se briser,” as the “sifflement triste d’une pipe qui jute” (108), as “aigüe,” as “sifflante comme une pompe qui fuit” (108), adding that Théophile Gautier described Schwob’s voice as indescribable (108).

## **Epitaph**



Almost exactly two years ago, I went to a public lecture given by the Australian performance artist Stelarc, organized in conjunction with his Ear on Arm Exhibition. The Ear on Arm project involves literally growing a 1/4 scale ear on the artist's arm using an implanted ear scaffold built of living cells in which a miniature microphone is inserted, which will effectively become, as the accompanying pamphlet explains, "an Internet organ for the body" through its ability to channel the "acoustical presence of another body from somewhere else." Describing the medical challenges of such a process, the brochure states that "the body is a living system which isn't easy to surgically sculpt." The Ear on Arm project, we are told, "manifests both a desire to deconstruct our evolutionary architecture and to integrate microminiaturized electronics inside the body."

The literal embodiment of sound from elsewhere spoke to me of the desire to capture the fine threads that make up the tangle of a living network, to incorporate social systems through a series of abject operations and to carry them on the individual vessels of organic existence through unnavigable territory. It somehow spoke to me of the constant, relentless reality of loss, the frustration of the invisible, the impossibility of the infinite, of not knowing where self-perpetuating energy resides, or whether we exist materially or are invisible to the naked eye.

I thought of a nineteenth-century auditor listening to recordings from beyond the grave grinding out of an improbable apparatus.

I believe this may have been an antithetical reaction to the response Ear on Arm was meant to elicit. But what is response and what is reaction, and are we so certain of

our ability to navigate unfamiliar territory that we are willing to dissolve the tenuous division between the limits of sound and the deafening waves of silence?

The words that form bodies of work are recorded in the abstract space where bodies cease to be and vice versa, elliptically. This is how we define the infinitely small and the infinitely vast, and it is how we lay the foundation for an edifice of origin and identity, anchored in the agitated waters of an uncertain future. From the convergent space of sound and silence do we hear the echo of our last words, articulate with the weight of finality. Our hope is that these words will resonate in defiance of distance, augmented through the prosthesis of cultural dissemination, dissolving what is effectively dead air.

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